# THE WAY OF THE CARDINES

By STANLEY PORTAL HYATT

Author of "BLACK SHEEP"

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# THE WAY OF THE CARDINES

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# THE WAY OF THE CARDINES

By
STANLEY PORTAL HYATT

Author of
"Black Sheep,"
"The Law of the Bolo,"
etc.

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To L.,

WHO, THROUGH HER LOVING SYMPATHY AND
TENDER CARE, HER INFINITE GOODNESS,
ALONE MADE THE COMPLETION OF
THIS BOOK POSSIBLE.

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# THE WAY OF THE CARDINES

## CHAPTER I

### THE TOWN OF MATI AWAKENS

THE town of Mati was still asleep—at least for all practical purposes. True, a few native fishermen were languidly getting ready to launch their canoes, and the never-ending war between lean pig and leaner dog, a war in which the spoils were stray pieces of offal, was being waged in a score of places along the beach; but, beyond these, and the inevitable water-buffalo wallowing heavily in the mud at the back of the old stone fort, nothing was stirring.

Possibly, a stranger would have found it hard to believe that Mati really was the principal seaport of the Island of Katu; yet, in fairness to the place, it must be admitted that it was abnormally quiet that morning. Though the natives—pure-blooded Malays for the most part—had a deep-rooted prejudice against work of any kind, the useful members of the community, the Europeans and Chinese, generally made the

most of the two or three comparatively cool hours which followed the dawn; but, on this occasion, the previous day had been a festival, and, as the finals of the cock-fights had not been finished, the Raja had ordered a second public holiday.

The sport in the cock-pits—which are in the open space at the back of the New Palace, where old Raja Seyid's seraglio used to stand before the Chinese pirates burned half Mati, some fifty years ago—would not begin again until noon; consequently, there was no reason for any native, save such fishermen as had lost all their money by backing the wrong cocks the previous day, to rise early: whilst, in accordance with a recent edict, all places of business belonging to foreigners were closed compulsorily on public holidays, the sole exception being the combined store and hotel owned by Messrs. Gunther and Schultz, who, in addition to holding the liquor monopoly for the whole island, also acted as bankers to His Highness, the Raja Ismail.

The first fisherman had just passed the end of the old stone jetty, one of Raja Seyid's unfinished works, when he paused suddenly, his paddle in mid-air; then his voice cut shrilly through the still atmosphere.

"Ohé, my brothers! There is a strange ship, a ship of war belonging to the English, coming up the eastern passage."

Instantly, the town of Mati began to awaken.

A native appeared on the poop of the ancient steam yacht which constituted the Navy of Katu, rubbed his eyes, stared eastwards for a full minute, and then proceeded leisurely to run up the national flag, the double-headed elephant on a blue ground. A few minutes later, a similar flag was flying above the fort. Then, with his cigar, the officer of the guard touched off the priming of the little brass signal cannon, and the whole of the inhabitants of Mati knew that a steamship was about to enter the port.

The boy had already put the morning tea tray on a little bamboo table, and was pulling aside the mosquito curtains, when the gun boomed out. The white man sat up quickly. His hair was tousled, his eyes a little inflamed, and he was obviously wearing a pyjama jacket belonging to some one much bigger than himself; yet, despite these disadvantages, he looked clean, young, cheerful, and essentially British. You realised, instinctively, that he used a tooth-brush every day, and pitied every one who had not been to a Public School.

"What are they making that row over, Juan?" he asked. "I suppose they're not shooting their rotten fighting cocks, by any lucky chance?"

The boy—he was a Filipino half-caste—shrugged his shoulders. "It is a steamer, señor," he answered, as he put the cigarette box, the decanter, and the soda syphon, on the table

beside the tea tray. "Always, when a steamer comes to Mati, they fire a gun to let the Raja know."

Jack Bartram yawned, lighted a cigarette, then poured himself out a cup of tea.

"I dare say it does need a gun to make His Highness, the Raja Ismail, understand anything this morning," he muttered. "Phew! It was my first state banquet in Katu, and I don't mind if it's the last—at least whilst Carl Gunther holds the liquor monopoly," he drew his hand across his forehead, and tossed his cigarette through the French window, over the veranda, as though the taste were repulsive to him. "Have you seen the Señor Raithe yet?" he went on.

Juan nodded in the direction of the veranda. "He is there, Señor. He is always up too early," then, suddenly, he became very busy, folding up the guest's dress clothes, as the figure of his employer appeared in the doorway.

"It is refreshing to know that I have one conventional virtue—early rising. It makes me feel quite Mid-Victorian," Gerald Raithe laughed quietly. His speech was slow, almost drawling, yet, somehow, it suited the man, just as the man himself, white-clad, cool-looking, with a suggestion of strength behind his languor, seemed to suit his surroundings. His hair was turning grey, and his moustache appeared to have snapped off from the heat, but, none the less, when he smiled, he did not look more than his thirty-five

years. "How are you this morning, Jack?" he went on. "Most fellows feel a bit off after one of Ismail's dinners. I'm used to them, you see, having been five years in Katu. . . . You may go, Juan," he turned sharply to the Filipino, who was obviously listening to every word. "One's got to be careful here, Jack. It all goes back to Ismail, who, as you've seen for yourself, is a typical young degenerate, the kind which is bad to start with, and is made far worse by being sent to Oxford. Some day——" he paused, and stared out over the harbour, where a whole fleet of dugout canoes was now hurrying to meet the incoming steamer.

Bartram, who, having apparently got his mouth right, had helped himself to a fresh cigarette and a whisky and soda, looked up inquiringly. Once, he had been Gerald's Raithe's cabin-mate on a Cape mail-steamer, and, though they had only just met again after a lapse of seven years, he had good reason for remembering how correct some of the other man's prophecies had proved to be.

"Well, some day——?" he asked.

Gerald Raithe turned round. "Some day, I shall shoot the bounder," he answered calmly. "That is, if he doesn't have me knifed or poisoned first. He dines with me, and I dine with him, and we pledge one another in the liquors of the Fatherland, though I detest potato spirit, and he is supposed to be an orthodox Mahometan. But it doesn't follow that we love one another.

. . . That steamer is a long time rounding the Point," he changed the subject abruptly.

" What steamer is it ? " the guest asked.

The other shook his head. " Not the faintest idea. Nothing is due here for at least a week. Probably, it's only a tramp, looking in on the chance of getting some cargo. Sometimes—— Excuse me." Once more, he broke off suddenly, though this time he jumped lightly from the veranda, and hurried down to the roadway. An English girl had just pulled up her little Chinese pony outside the gate, and was evidently waiting for him.

She made a pretty picture, as Jack Bartram, who was watching from well inside the room, could not help confessing to himself. Little more than a child in point of years, she was essentially dainty, from her big white topee—Mati is within half a degree of the Equator—down to her brown riding boots. Also, he could see quite plainly how her face flushed with pleasure at the sight of Gerald Raithe.

Bartram nodded to himself. " No doubt who she is. There's only one English girl on the Island, so it must be Miss Wrench, daughter of that old reprobate of a shipping agent. . . . Jove, what a contrast ! "

Meanwhile, Miss Wrench was saying in a high, clear voice, " It's a yacht, Jerry, a big white yacht with a yellow funnel. I was up on the rise, and, of course, I could see right over

the mangroves at the Point. Now, I'm going down to find out whose it is. If you get your topee at once, you can come with me. But be quick. It's not often anything exciting happens in Mati."

Gerald Raithe had his hand on her pony's neck, and, despite her impatience, he did not seem inclined to remove it. "I've got a guest here," he answered. "You know, of course, though you haven't met him—Jack Bartram, who has been sent out by the Pepper Trust. I must wait for him. And, I say, Patsy," he looked up suddenly, "Patsy, you oughtn't to go out alone like that. It's not safe. Ali Hajji and his gang were within five miles of here last week, and they're not the only enemies. There is one at least in Mati itself." He spoke meaningly, and a dangerous glint came into his eyes.

Miss Patricia Wrench tossed her head. "I can't do without exercise. You're always lecturing me, Jerry, and I hate it. Please let my pony go."

Instead of obeying, however, the man dropped his hand from the animal's neck on to the rein. "If I ask it as a favour to me, Patsy, you will not refuse," he answered calmly.

For a moment, it seemed as if he were wrong, as if she were going to refuse point blank. "You've no right to be rude and horrid," she began furiously. "I simply hate you"—then she happened to glance up at the Palace, which

was a bare fifty yards away, and saw a white-clad figure standing perfectly still on the flat roof. Her mood altered suddenly. "Very well, Jerry," she went on, almost meekly, "I'll promise—for the time being. But I simply hate you, all the same."

Gerald Raithe laughed. "Is that anything new? I believe you've told me so before. I'll see you down at the quay by and by and introduce Mr. Bartram."

"If he's your friend and as horrid as you, you needn't trouble," she flashed back. "There was a time when you wouldn't have waited for him, but would have walked down with me." Then, holding her head very high, so that he should not see the tears in her big grey eyes, she rode off towards the quay.

The man on the roof of the Palace was no longer looking out to sea, but was watching the English girl; and Gerald Raithe was watching him in turn.

Jack Bartram was almost dressed when his host strolled back to the house, cool and collected as ever.

"We may as well follow the general example and go down to the quay," Gerald drawled. "Miss Wrench tells me it's a big steam yacht. . . . Sounds quite interesting, doesn't it? I suppose she's got a pilot by now, and will be in soon. I hope the owner and his friends will appreciate the charms of Mati. At least, they

will be in time for the finals of the cock-fights."

As they walked down the cobbled road—Gerald Raithe's house was on the main street—Bartram happened to catch sight of the figure on the roof.

"His Highness, the Raja, is up unusually early," he remarked.

His companion nodded. "Yes, I expect he's wondering how much he'll be able to squeeze out of the new-comers. Gunther and Schultz are beginning to worry him for money, I hear."

## CHAPTER II

### THE CARDINE TRADITION

THE Island of Katu is about the same size as Mauritius, that lonely little outlier of the Empire, which was once the key of the Indian Ocean, and still bears a key on its coat of arms, in memory of past glories. Thirty miles by twenty—roughly, that is the size of Katu.

Viewing it from the sea, you gather the impression of a series of hills covered with dark green jungle, forbidding, mysterious, pregnant with the possibilities of murder and sudden death. Almost insensibly, you realise that civilization is to be found in Mati only, that the interior is the home of lawless little brown men with sharp knives.

Above everything else towers the peak of Kini-Dah, the great volcano, grim and lowering, overhanging Sudang Bay, that most perfect of natural harbours.

Somehow, all the jungle of the Malay Archipelago seems to repel the white man, to challenge him to enter at the peril of his life, and Katu appeared to have all the repellent features in an

exaggerated form. It was beautiful, certainly; but a man-eating tiger is beautiful in his way, beautiful and abominable. . . .

"So that is Mati, Captain Simpson. It's a perfect little bay, and those white Arab-sort of houses with their flat roofs and the hundreds of native huts behind them look tremendously romantic. But why have we come to Mati at all?" the speaker put the glasses down, and turned to the skipper of the steam yacht "White Lady," with a half-humorous look of enquiry in her wonderful eyes.

The sailor tugged at his long red moustache and flushed, as was his way when his owner's wife spoke to him directly.

"I'm sure I don't know, your ladyship," he answered, "It's one of Sir Charles' ideas—'No one else ever goes to the island,' he said to me, 'So we may as well have a look at it.' He said he had something to do with the Raja while he was at Oxford; and he'd like to see how the—the nigger had turned out."

Lady Cardine laughed lightly. "Of course!" I remember now. How stupid of me to forget! And have you been here before, Captain Simpson? Why does one never, never hear of Katu? I thought all these places had to be put on maps, for the Board School children to be bothered with. Sir Charles is so fond of Board Schools and teachers. Perhaps he will see that Katu is taught about now!" Then she moved towards

the weather end of the bridge, her skirts rustling gently, and leaned on the rail.

Captain Simpson grinned. He knew the grim, gouty, old baronet so well that he was able fully to appreciate Lady Cardine's sarcasm. Once, from the Strangers' Gallery, he had heard his owner giving his views on the subject of State Education; and he had never forgotten the incident.

Lady Cardine lighted a cigarette, and seemed to forget everything else in watching the little fleet of dugout canoes racing to meet the yacht. The owners of those craft were in a hurry, for once. There was a chance of earning a good deal of money with very little exertion, perhaps of stealing something quite valuable as well, and the Orang-Laut, the sea gipsies of Katu, had, temporarily, awakened out of their chronic state of languor.

"My Lady's got one of her good fits on to-day," the chief officer nodded towards the tall, perfectly dressed and perfectly proportioned figure on the skipper's own part of the bridge. "Although the doctor tells me that the old gentlemen is a bit off colour again."

The skipper frowned. He had served Sir Charles with a dog-like fidelity ever since the splendid, two-thousand-ton yacht had first been commissioned, ten years previously, and when, eighteen months ago, the hard-faced old baronet had brought a lady thirty years his junior on board, and had introduced her as his wife, Joseph

Simpson had found it both easy and natural to be equally loyal and devoted to her.

Things had been said, on shore, about Lady Cardine which Captain Simpson had not liked, and one man at least—he was a master in a Mission school on the China coast—would carry to the grave an outward and visible sign of the skipper's disapproval, in the shape of a badly-set left arm—he had fallen rather heavily from the first-floor balcony of the hotel on to the pavement—but once only had the ship's company heard him comment on his owner's wife. That had been at the Christmas dinner in Calcutta, at which he had presided, Sir Charles and Lady Cardine having gone ashore as guests of the Commander-in-Chief.

"She has given Sir Charles a fresh lease of life, and she's the most beautiful woman in the world. May God bless her, and blight her enemies," he had said, a little huskily, in proposing her health.

As a consequence of his views, he was not slow to reprimand his first officer, a comparative youngster, who had only joined at Hong-Kong.

"Her ladyship is always the same, Mr. March," he said stiffly. "She's your owner's wife, too. And now, you will kindly get for'ard, and tell those yellow-skinned pirates to keep their filthy dugouts clear of this ship. If they don't, I'll run them down. I know my way into this forsaken port."

Perhaps Lady Cardine overheard his words,

or she may only have guessed at them ; anyway, she smiled, tossed her half-smoked cigarette overboard, then went along the gangway from the bridge to the smoking-room, where her husband, stretched at full length on the sofa, his foot swathed in the lightest of white fabrics, was talking to his steward in the language of the really gouty man.

Sir Charles looked round quickly as he heard a step in the doorway—he was more than ready to resent the presence of anyone who might come within reach of his foot—but the moment he realised who the new-comer was, his grim old face lighted up with a smile which had something almost pathetically sweet in it. He put out a twisted hand, rather helplessly. Lady Cardine took it in both of hers—they were large hands, cool, strong, and beautifully shaped—gave the steward a look which sent him hurrying through the door, then kissed her husband lightly on the forehead.

" What's the matter, dear ? " she asked.

The man growled out a curse on the steward.

" He's no use. Don't let the fool come near me again. . . . Are we getting close to Mati now ? There's a man in the place I wanted to see. . . . You know, Margaret, the man we looked for in Nagasaki." He spoke a little haltingly, as though afraid she might resent his words.

But, instead, her grip on his hand tightened. " I knew, dear—or, at least, I guessed. You're

quite right—as things are. I'm so sorry," she gave a queer little sob, which meant more with her than a flood of tears would have meant with most women. "I told you, Charles, you should have chosen some one who was certain to give you a son. Then, you wouldn't have had to look for this vagrant cousin, who will be your heir."

"Heir to the damned title only," he growled. "And I wouldn't have married any other woman. What you've done for me—" he broke off suddenly, pretending that the gout was to blame for the unsteadiness of his voice; then he went on in his ordinary, cynical tone. "If he's here, as the Bank people said, we'll see just how big a waster he is; then we'll go straight home. I should like to die at Cardine Place."

She was too wise a woman to protest at his words.

A great doctor, a doctor who was not afraid to speak the truth even to one of the richest and most famous men in England, had told him exactly how long he might expect to live.

Sir Charles' retort had been characteristic. "Can you stop this confounded gout during that time? I don't mind if you knock off a month or two in doing it. I object to my wife being worried over it."

Already, a large portion of the allotted term had run out; and, now, as if to mock him, the gout had returned. He had fought splendidly,

was still fighting splendidly, to keep his temper under control, and some of those political opponents who had, in the past, foamed at the mouth over the autocratic methods of the former head of the War Office, might have had the grace to be a little ashamed, could they have seen him in the days of his weakness.

"The Cardine Way"—how many leading articles had been written with those words as their text! Hundreds of pounds, thousands of pounds had been paid to hysterical scribes for demanding to know why, for the last century and a half, ever since the days of the Great Commoner, there had been at least one Cardine holding high office under the Crown. The obvious answer, that the Cardines were the most able family in England, was, of course, not satisfactory from a party point of view.

It had always been difficult to grapple with the Cardines, because so few of them had wallowed in the mire of party politics. Walter Cardine the First, Warren Hastings' right-hand man, after practically annexing a territory containing twenty million people—annexing it without the ghost of an authority from anyone—had introduced law and order, hanged or shot all disturbers of the peace, no matter what their rank, and had then come home to stand by his adored chief. He was Cardine of Cardine Place, head of one of the greatest families in the kingdom, but he knew that his support of the most

maligned Englishman of his time would bring added honour to that family. It was only by actions of that kind that one could add fresh glories to the Cardine record—at least such was the Cardine idea, the Cardine Way.

Walter Cardine the Second had served with Sir John Moore, had been in the rearguard during the Retreat to Corunna, had proved himself a true Cardine, had helped at midnight to lower the body of his beloved chief—almost the greatest of English soldiers—into that grave by the seashore, and had, in consequence, been practically debarred from further service. Wellington did not forgive easily when his jealousy had been aroused; he never forgot that the greater glory in Spain belonged to John Moore; and Moore's men had no chance with him.

There had been "Charleses" before the Walters —the baronetcy went back to 1640—and a Charles succeeded Walter the Second, a Charles who supported Catholic Emancipation, opposed the Reform Bill, won the Derby, and found in a common detestation of Germans the basis for a close friendship with Palmerston. "A perfectly hopeless man," party managers on both sides called him. "It's the Cardine Way, to think themselves bigger than everybody else." But, for once, Palmerston had not laughed. "It's the Cardines, at least the Cardine spirit, we want," he had said.

But if the Charles Cardine of those days had

done nothing striking, other Cardines had justified their existence. India had always appealed to them. There was a Cardine at Plassy, two Cardine at Chillianwallah. The son of the Chillianwallah Cardine served as a lieutenant in Hodson's Horse, whilst his cousin was the last Englishman killed before the Relief of Lucknow.

And then, of course, there was Lord Waterson —Hubert Cardine he had been—the Viceroy of India. A younger son and childless, he had consented to take a peerage, because it was part of the game, but it was an understood thing that the Head of the Family should always remain plain Cardine—the baronetcy, of course, did not count.

Lord Waterson's short, vivid period of office is a matter of history. His enemies raged at him as a reactionary ; the men who understood India worshipped him. He was the typical Cardine, in his strength, in his failings, in his inability to see that he had not the right to ride rough-shod over every one who opposed him. He died in harness, or, rather, he worked himself to death, greatly to the chagrin of the Opposition at home, who had been looking forward to the delight of yelping round the stricken lion when he returned.

Of course, there were other Cardines who earned fame in the public service, even if they did not secure it. John Cardine, the Commissioner for M'Lembaland ; Admiral Cardine, who pre-

vented the Germans from seizing the most valuable island in the Pacific ; Raymond Cardine, who, as ambassador to the Sublime Porte, was the first man to tell the truth concerning the Armenians, and the alleged atrocities practised on those unspeakable people—all these, and a score of lesser ones, deserved well of the nation, and received little beyond abuse, which, after all was not so surprising, because all of them had the " Cardine Way." As Raymond Cardine put it when he retired from public life, " There never yet was one of the family who could learn to suffer fools gladly," a damaging confession for a ex-ambassador to make.

But no other Cardine had ever bulked so largely in the public view as had that Sir Charles who was now lying, a hopeless invalid, on board the " White Lady." Perhaps he was not the greatest of the men of his name, but he lived on into the age of cheap newspapers, and he was always " good copy." He had had an advantage which other Cardines had lacked—the possession of an immense fortune, which had come to him through his mother ; but, though he had spent his money royally, he had never tried to buy popularity. True, a certain measure of popularity had come to him, especially amongst the older type of working men, to whom a clean-handed sportsman, who is also a great aristocrat, is always a fascinating figure, but he had far more enemies than friends. At Epsom, the

Cardine colours would be certain to evoke a storm of cheers, whilst in Trafalgar Square a scurrilous denunciation of the Cardine family would ensure a full collecting box, and much liquid refreshment for the speaker, provided, of course, that the police did not intervene in time.

It was impossible for a Cardine to be Prime Minister—since the extension of the franchise the ability to " suffer fools gladly " has been the essential condition for that post—but it was equally impossible for a patriotic Cabinet not to contain Sir Charles Cardine. Really, he might have asked for, and secured, any post, short of that of Premier, but the War Office had always satisfied him. He knew where he could do good work, and being, in his own estimation at least, too great a man by birth to need advertisement or applause, he was content with what was then one of the minor ministerial posts.

He was, undoubtedly, the greatest War Minister of modern times, and, naturally, he was hated accordingly, both in Pall Mall and in the Service generally. During his régime, fools were not suffered at all ; instead, they were made to suffer. It needs a real aristocrat, a man who is so absolutely sure of his own position that he can raise his hat to a charwoman, to deal with snobs. Sir Charles Cardine had that advantage over most politicians—or statesmen rather, because he was never a mere office-seeker—and

so there were many officers who did not love him, many who left his presence with monocles swinging unguarded on the ends of their cords, and swear-words, which they had not dared to utter, surging up to their lips. Sir Charles had a most brutal habit of saying that an officer must be a gentleman, and that the fact of being an officer did not make a man into a gentleman, and that no gentleman could draw His Majesty's pay and neglect His Majesty's work.

"An insulting brute"—scores, hundreds, of women had heard that description of Sir Charles Cardine from the lips of offended warriors, or pseudo-warriors, and, more than once, the words had been repeated to the Secretary for War; but to Cardine of Cardine Place it mattered nothing at all. He did his duty, in the Cardine Way, according to the code of the Cardines.

"The supply of Cardines is, fortunately, running short"—an Opposition paper, devoted to various fads, such as the propagation of Small-pox, and the Man-and-Brother theory for Black Men, had used those words, when, the decree *nisi* having been made absolute, Colonel Cardine had married Mrs. Tankerey, formerly Millie Maners, of the "Orpheum." Then, after the manner of its kind, it had gone on to throw mud at the Secretary for War, because his cousin and heir, who was the son of the "Hodson's Horse" Cardine, had brought disgrace on the

name, being the first who had ever done so publicly.

It was, of course, bad form as well as bad journalism, but the Secretary for War had ignored the attacks entirely, and when, six months later, the Colonel had died, he had acted as chief mourner, the Colonel's son by a former marriage, now the heir presumptive of the Cardine dignities and responsibilities, being abroad, in parts unknown.

Sir Charles Cardine's marriage is, of course, a matter of history—at any rate, it led to the making of history. When an invitation from High Quarters was sent to him, and his wife was ignored, he resigned his post in the Cabinet, and, as an indirect result, the Ministry went to pieces. In the General Election which ensued, the party was defeated hopelessly, and the other side, who stood for all that the Cardines detested, had been in office ever since.

Sir Charles Cardine had taken his death sentence well, taken it like the brave man he was. There was no longer any chance of his great hope, that he might have a son by the woman he loved, being fulfilled, and all his desire now was to spare that woman unhappiness of any kind. Margaret Cardine represented to him all that he had missed through the rest of his life. He had grown old as a bachelor, had grown cynical, hard, immoral if you will, so far as women were concerned, but Margaret had altered all that, still, as he often told

himself bitterly, it had come too late in life. The cup of happiness had been put to his lips, only to be dashed away immediately.

Now, through the open door of the yacht's smoking-room, he could see the eastern arm of Mati harbour, a sketch of palm-fringed beach, which ended ingloriously in a mangrove swamp.

"What's the rest of it like?" he asked.

Lady Cardine gave him a sketch of the place in a few phrases—she had a wonderful mastery of words. "Behind the town, the country rises," she added. "Hills first, then mountains, and, crowning it all, a splendid snow-clad volcano."

"I must take it for granted. It would need more than that to make me move to-day," her husband answered. "I suppose there'll be some sort of a British Consul, who can tell me what I want to know."

Margaret Cardine nodded, then she smiled. "Captain Simpson believes you have come to see the Raja.'

The invalid laughed grimly. "Simpson would believe anything I told him. As for His Highness, I came in contact with him several times officially—or, rather, he came in contact with me. Certain white women in England had been foolish enough to pet him, and I was asked to see him about the matter."

"Ugh!" she made a quick gesture of disgust. "A little yellow Malay, who, I suppose, has got a score of wives by now! . . . Well, dear,

judging by the kind things Captain Simpson is saying to the native fishermen, we must be near the anchorage." She bent down once more, and kissed his forehead. As she went out, the old man's eyes, the only part of him that was unchanged by illness, followed her with a world of love and longing in them.

"Stop"—the engine-room telegraph rang out just as Lady Cardine reached the bridge again; then the cable rattled through the hawse pipe, and the yacht was brought to, halfway between the Raja's navy and an ancient steamer of the type you expect to find in the Malay Archipelago, a venerable marine curiosity with a very tall funnel and rust-streaked sides. A dozen small sailing craft, three or four steam launches, and a rather smart-looking schooner, completed the tale of the shipping in Mati Harbour.

The dugouts had been warned off in terms which left no doubt as to Captain Simpson's intentions, if their owners tried to board the yacht; but a small motor launch, with one white man and a couple of well-dressed natives in the stern, was allowed alongside.

A short parley with the skipper, then all three visitors came up the ladder, and were conducted to the bridge by the quartermaster.

Lady Cardine acknowledged the white stranger's salute coldly—he was a heavy-built person, red-faced, and he spoke with a strong German accent, characteristics which did not appeal to her.

"I am the British Consul, and these are His Highness' Harbour Master and the Chief Collector of Customs," the white man said.

The skipper took the card without much enthusiasm. "Mr. Carl Gunther," he read out. "Ah! I see. Are there no British on the island then?"

"Twelve in all, and four Englishwomen," the other answered, and Margaret Cardine thought she detected a trace of triumphant malice in his voice.

Captain Simpson opened his cigar case, and, obviously as a matter of duty, offered it to the Consul and his two yellow-skinned companions.

"This is the yacht, 'White Lady,' owned by Sir Charles Cardine, Baronet," the skipper went on. "If you and your friends," he glanced towards the two natives "will come to my room, we can do all that is necessary officially. Where is the port doctor?"

Carl Gunther shrugged his shoulders. He had been quick to catch the note of polite hostility in the Englishman's voice, and was more than ready to reciprocate the feeling. "He is of your nation," he answered. "And, as His Highness gave a dinner last night, he is not quite up to his work this morning. Perhaps your own doctor ——"

"He will show you a clean bill of health," Captain Simpson cut him short, then made a

motion in the direction of the gangway leading to his own quarters.

The German had been eyeing Lady Cardine obliquely. "Are Sir Charles and Lady Cardine aboard?" he asked.

"Yes, both of them," the skipper calmly ignored the hint. "This way, please."

Margaret Cardine smiled a little sadly. "If there were a few more men like Joseph Simpson about," she murmured, "Charles and he—Oh, why was I too late?"

## CHAPTER III

### GERALD RAITHE IS ANGRY

Miss Patricia Wrench was standing in the shade of the Customs Shed, her pony's bridle looped over her arm, when Gerald Raithe brought his guest to her, and gravely requested permission to introduce him.

For a few moments, Bartram felt himself to be the least important person on the earth—a new sensation, so far as he was concerned. The girl's frigid politeness was almost overwhelming; then, perhaps because she thought she had punished him enough for having detained his host, her mood changed, and she became perfectly natural.

"Carl Gunther has gone off to the yacht," she said. "And he's taken his two tame orang-outangs with him. I do wish he would come back and tell us who the visitors are."

Jack Bartram looked puzzled. "Tame orang-outangs?" he asked.

Patsy laughed. Gerald was holding her pony for her now, and she had quite recovered her temper. "Oh, I mean the Harbour Master and

the Collector of Customs," she exclaimed. " Carl Gunther is the real chief of the port."

Even now, Bartram was not satisfied. " But why should the Teutonic person be the one to go out ? "

" He's British Consul, and so enjoys privileges denied to us," Gerald Raithe's voice was unusually bitter. " I thought I had told you already."

It was Miss Wrench who answered the question which rose, naturally enough, to Jack Bartram's lips. " Oh, it was Mr. Lecher who got him that, you know, the M.P. who wrote the book *Under Tyrant Britain's Heel.* ' Will ' Lecher, don't his friends call him, Jerry ? He used to make gas, or clean sewers, or something like that, before all the other gas-makers, or sewer-people, subscribed for him to go to Parliament. He learnt all about the Further East in a month, and it was Carl Gunther who showed him round. They met on board ship, and soon after Mr. Lecher got home, they stopped poor old Daddy Mallowe being Consul, and gave the post to Gunther, who was already German Consul."

Jack Bartram glanced inquiringly at his host, who nodded, " Yes, Patsy—I beg your pardon, Miss Wrench—has put it more kindly than I should have done ; but her facts are in order. I suppose Mr. Will Lecher's book must have sold very well, for, in spite of the amount of money spent on his tour, he has recently bought himself a new house."

"How do you know?" The question had come out almost involuntarily. It seemed absurd, almost incredible, that an exile in Katu should find out such things.

Gerald Raithe laughed. "Oh, Patsy was interested in her sewer-man—really, he's not that at all, but something 'amalgamated' and quite clean, with soft, white hands—and so I was interested, too. But we don't want to talk about it. Carl Gunther might not be pleased, you see;" then he changed the subject abruptly. "What's the yacht's name, Patsy?" he asked.

The girl, who was looking through her glasses, answered without turning round. "She's just swinging so that I can see it. . . . 'White' . . . 'White Baby!' . . . No, 'White Lady'—that's it."

Bartram was at the girl's side now, so neither of them happened to see the expression on Gerald Raithe's face. He went very white under his tan, then flushed, and after that took a step forward, and, quite calmly to all outward appearance, waited his turn to use the glasses.

"The launch is coming back," the girl announced. "We shall soon know all about it now. I do hope there are some nice people, and that they're going to stay a few days, and give dinners, and so on. But no one interesting ever seems to come to Mati."

"You are rather unkind to Mr. Bartram, Miss Wrench," the speaker, a thin-faced, haggard

man, with a small black tie, which, in some subtle way, seemed to clash strangely with his suit of tussore silk, had come up behind them noiselessly. " Have you found him so dull already ? "

Deliberately, she raised the glasses again, so as not to have to look round. " Mr. Bartram is going to stay here, I understand, Mr. Darkin," she retorted. " If you had tried to overhear the rest of the conversation, you would have found that I was referring to visitors only."

He smiled gently, as one might do at the speech of a clever child ; then turned to Gerald.

" Have you any idea who the strangers are, Mr. Raithe ? " he asked.

The other followed Patsy Wrench's example, and did not trouble to look round, " I don't even know that they are strangers," he replied curtly.

Mr. Albert Darkin smiled again, meekly sighed, then made his way with careful steps to the pier-head, as if to meet the launch.

" Pig and humbug ! " Patsy's speech was occasionally most expressive. " He gives me the creepy-crawls, Jerry. I can't be nice to him, even though he is one of the biggest traders in the island ; and if I were a man, I would never trust him in business."

" I don't," Gerald answered grimly, " any more than I trust Ismail, or Gunther, or several more of them. . . . By the way, here comes Ismail himself—and the scallywags."

The girl gave a queer little exclamation, partly

annoyance, and partly—at least, it seemed so to Jack Bartram—partly fear. A minute later, the Raja, a young Malay, who seemed to be trying to counteract his natural weakness of expression by a kind of dissolute swagger, was raising his hat to Miss Wrench—now, he was clad in European costume—whilst the scallywags, half a dozen of his favourite courtiers, were standing a little way off, apparently glowering at Gerald Raithe.

" Good-morning, Raithe. Good-morning, Mr. Bartram " ; his English accent was almost perfect. " I suppose, like the rest of us, Miss Wrench, you're wondering who the visitors can be."

Patsy was flicking her boot with her riding whip. " You can soon find out," she said, without facing him. " Herr Gunther is just returning now."

There was a momentary flash of anger in the Raja's eyes, then he turned deliberately to Gerald.

" That gun woke us all too early. Why, it's only a few hours since we broke up. . . . Had a little party, Miss Wrench. Men only, you know. Your father was there, but couldn't ask you, this time " then, with the air of a man who, having been insulting, knows that his insolence will not be punished, he strutted off towards the pier-head.

Illogically, perhaps, Patsy vented her wrath on Gerald Raithe. " Why do you go ? Why do you dine—with a native ? " she asked passionately. " If you refused, he wouldn't dare

insult a white woman like that. I can forgive Mr. Bartram because you took him there, but not you, Jerry, not you."

He laid a hand on her arm, gripping it nervously, and, looking up at him, she saw something very nearly akin to murder in his eyes; but his voice was quiet and even as before.

"You know why I go, Patsy," he drawled. "You know perfectly well, though no one else does. . . . It's part of a game I'm playing. Bartram," he turned to the other man, "a game with high stakes, the highest possible stakes."

Bartram flushed. Hitherto, he had managed to drift through life without touching tragedy; but now he felt that he was very close to grim realities, and he rose to the occasion, "May I take a hand too?" he asked, very quietly. "I think it is a game that would interest me a good deal."

The glance which Patsy Wrench flashed on him seemed, somehow, to alter his whole outlook on life. He was ready now to do anything which would win her approval; but Gerald shook his head, "No—at least not yet. If I want you, I'll let you know. . . . I think the most excellent British Consul has landed at last, with his news."

Practically the whole of the white community was on the quay now, and the word was quickly passed along.

Patsy heard it from Mrs. Blackwood, the wife of her father's partner.

"It's Sir Charles Cardine's yacht," the little lady—Mrs. Blackwood was as dainty as she was sweet—said excitedly, "You've heard of Sir Charles, Patsy, the great statesman: and Lady Cardine is on board, too. We must ask her up to the house, of course. You will help me, won't you, darling? Miss Darkin and Mrs. Earwaker aren't the least bit of good, are they?"

Gerald Raithe seemed to have recovered his self-possession now. He stood in the shade of the Customs shed, still holding Patsy Wrench's pony, whilst that young lady and Mrs. Blackwood strolled up towards the town, discussing means of entertaining the distinguished visitor.

"I know Darkin, and I can imagine a female Darkin—big teeth and tracts; but who is Mrs. Earwaker?" it was Jack Bartram who spoke.

Gerald laughed, none too pleasantly. "Earwaker is our missionary—you haven't met him, because he has the fever. The Earwakers and the Darkins share that house up there—it was Raja Seyid's seraglio after the Chinos had burnt the old one . . . Mrs. Earwaker? Oh, she suits her name admirably, but I doubt if she would suit Lady Cardine."

Once more, the other looked at him in surprise. "You seem to keep deuced well in touch with things, Raithe," he said. "I shouldn't have

thought you would have heard about it in this forsaken island."

"About what?" Gerald demanded.

Jack Bartram flushed. "The stories about her—Lady Cardine, I mean. No one knew exactly who she was, and all sorts of yarns were going round. You remember he resigned from the Cabinet very suddenly; well, they say it was over his marriage. Some one Big invited him and not her. Anyway, the Ministry fell to pieces as a result, and the present crowd got in. There's a fellow at the War Office now who, only a year or two ago, used to denounce soldiers as parasites."

The other man's face had grown very hard. "Yes, it's Tarle, the brother-in-law of Miss Wrench's *bête-noir*, Mr. Lecher. As for Lady Cardine, I have not the honour of knowing either her or her husband personally; but I have not a shadow of doubt that the stories concerning her are untrue. I shall make it my business to deal with any one who circulates them in Mati," his manner had become stiff, almost arrogant, and there was no doubt about his sincerity.

Bartram laughed, a little uneasily. He had never seen his host in this mood before, and he hardly knew what to make of it. "I'm sorry," he began. "Really I didn't mean anything——"

But it is doubtful whether Gerald Raithe even knew he was speaking.

The Raja was coming back along the quay, very slowly, accompanied by Gunther and Dar-

kin. The white men were laughing in a way that was not pleasant to hear, and the yellow man was sneering.

"She's not so bad looking in—what do you call it, Darkin?—a flash way. She treated me in the high and haughty style." Gerald caught the German's words clearly—perhaps he was meant to catch them.

Albert Darkin rubbed his white hands together gently. "She wasn't always 'My Lady.' You know what they say"—and he began a scandalous anecdote.

Gerald Raithe took a step forward, and laid a heavy hand on the man's shoulder, swinging him round so that they were face to face.

"Mr. Darkin," he said in a voice that the others hardly recognised, by reason of the suppressed passion in it. "I intend to flog anyone who slanders Lady Cardine in my hearing. Anyone," for a moment his eyes rested on the Raja and Gunther, "though you would get it most heavily, because you are insulting a lady of your own race and your own colour. Remember," then he let the other go, and, taking out his handkerchief, wiped the hand which had touched him.

Darkin had gone very white; Gunther was crimson, with the perspiration streaming down his face; whilst Ismail was spluttering with rage. The threat was too explicit, and had been made too openly, for there to be any doubt about the Englishman's meaning.

"Come along. You've said quite enough," Bartram took hold of Gerald's arm. "You're quite right, old fellow, in principle; I know that, and I wish I had the pluck to do it myself; but you're not very wise in your methods. Ismail's ruler here, an independent sovereign; and if you want protection, you've got to appeal to your bitterest enemy, that German pig. I wish you hadn't done this thing. I'm a new-comer in the island, but it seems to me that you've made your position impossible. If you escape being knifed, you'll be ruined by some new law or other. Already, you say, that young rotter Ismail is doing all he can to help Gunther and Schultz."

For a minute or so the other did not answer. When a man who is usually calm and cool becomes really moved, he does not regain his self-control without an effort.

"It's been brewing for a long time," he said at last. "I'm not sorry——"

"Jerry, Jerry dear. It was splendid." Patsy Wrench rushed up, despite the heat, and held out both her hands. "Oh, I am so proud of you," the look in her eyes confirmed her words. "But it was stupid of you, dreadfully stupid. Your life won't be safe here now."

Gerald Raithe smiled. "Do you know I've still got your pony, Patsy. You ran off with Mrs. Blackwood, and left him with me, so I had to do something to pass the time," he spoke lightly, though his tone failed to deceive his hearers.

It was Mrs. Blackwood who brought them back to the level of everyday things. She strolled up, fanning herself a little ostentatiously.

"My children," she remarked. "You are all standing in the sun, and that is not a very wise thing to do. Moreover, some one must go out to the yacht to pay a call on behalf of the British community, and the obvious person to do that is Gerald Raithe."

The latter shook his head. "Our Consul has already fulfilled that duty."

"My dear Gerald, it is far too hot here to answer sensible remarks, much less foolish ones," the little lady began to move towards the nearest patch of shade. "Patsy and I have already decided that you are to go off at once, with the compliments of ourselves, and invite Sir Charles and Lady Cardine to tea with us at our house. Walter, my husband, went out shooting early, and will not be back for some hours."

For a moment, Bartram thought that the other man was going to refuse; then, with a shrug of his shoulders, and a laugh which had not much mirth in it, Gerald Raithe consented.

"Very well. Write your note, Mrs. Blackwood. The sooner I get it over, the better. Probably, though, these people will be going on again in a few hours, as soon as they've got some fruit and vegetables."

## CHAPTER IV

### LADY CARDINE IS PUZZLED

"MR. RAITHE?"

Gerald was conscious of a tall, gracious lady in white coming in through the door of the yacht's music-room, Mrs. Blackwood's note in her hand.

"It is so kind of you," she said, "and, of course, of Mrs. Blackwood, too. I was longing to go ashore and have a look at the town, but Sir Charles, my husband, is ill, and it would have been so wretched to go alone."

As a rule, Gerald Raithe was neither shy nor awkward, but he felt himself to be both now. In some subtle way, Margaret Cardine was different from any other woman he had ever met—at least to him. Instinctively he knew that she was extraordinarily brilliant, but he realised, too, that she was far more than that.

Miss Patricia Wrench was a lady by birth and education; Mrs. Blackwood was the same; but Margaret Cardine was a great lady—therein lay the difference.

She did not sit down herself, nor ask him to

sit down, but stood with her hand resting on the table, looking at him with a kind of grave curiosity as though summing him up mentally.

"Yes, I will come ashore this afternoon," she went on. "That is, if Sir Charles is no worse."

The man started slightly, as if he had been thinking of something else. "I trust he is not very ill," he said.

"He is very ill indeed, terribly ill." Her voice sunk almost to a whisper. "But he would like to see you. There are some questions he wanted to ask, and" a ghost of a smile flickered on her lips, "he did not care about appealing to the British Consul. He has never been fond of the German race. Will you come this way?"

She left him no chance to hesitate, much less to refuse. Her attitude was perfectly plain. Nothing mattered to her, except her husband's wishes. Gerald was useful, valuable even, at at the moment, because he might possibly be of service to her husband, but she regarded him solely from that point of view. And, so far from being hurt by the knowledge, Gerald Raithe, who was usually supposed to rate himself highly, liked her infinitely better for it.

He was certain now that his championship of her that morning had been justified.

"This is Mr. Raithe, Charles." Lady Cardine made the introduction in a form which showed plainly that she and her husband had already

discussed the visitor during the few minutes he had been waiting in the music room.

The old statesman held out his twisted hand. Margaret Cardine raised her eyebrows slightly. For months past, he had never given that hand to anyone but herself.

"Sit down," he said. "Forgive an old man who can't rise to greet you. My wife," he lingered in a curious way over the words, as though he loved them, "My wife tells me of the kind invitation which you have brought. She will be delighted to accept. I cannot, as you see; but I wonder if you would add to our indebtedness by giving me some information. First, help yourself to a cigar—I know you will not mind our smoking, dear."

Gerald glanced across at Lady Cardine, who was standing behind the sofa, received a little nod of permission, then took a cigar from the box, cut it carefully, and lighted it. He was anxious to gain time, to readjust his ideas. The man in front of him seemed so utterly different from the pen-pictures of the gruff, overbearing old aristocrat, who was supposed to have made more personal enemies than any other Minister of his time.

"If I can help you, I shall only be too delighted,' he said at last. "I have been five years in Katu, so I know the island fairly well."

Sir Charles nodded. "It's a simple matter. but I didn't want to discuss it with that German.

By the way "—the question came sharply, in something of his traditional manner,—"why is that damned alien British Consul? Why aren't you Consul instead?"

Gerald smiled. He knew now that he was going to agree with this man on a good many points.

"When you get home again, Sir Charles, you must ask Mr. Lecher, M.P.," he answered. "You know—the author of *Under Tyrant Britain's Heel.* Herr Carl Gunther was useful to Mr. Lecher, and Mr. Lecher has influence with our present Ministry. It seems a small matter to have worried about. There are only twelve British subjects in Katu, and our old Consul was perfectly efficient."

Sir Charles gave him a keen glance. "Seems?" he echoed. "I see. Perhaps you will tell me of that later. And now as to my question. Have you ever met a man here called Cardine? Is there any man called Cardine on the island now?"

"I never met a man called Cardine in Katu," Gerald's answer came quickly and decisively. "I am certain there is no one known by that name in the island now. Any other white man here will confirm my words."

The old man, who had been watching him closely from under his shaggy eyebrows, nodded. "I am glad to know for certain. It relieves me of a good deal of anxiety, Mr. Raithe. Margaret, dear, will you light my cigar for me?"

For a minute or two, he puffed away in silence, whilst Gerald waited with an air which seemed to suggest that he was ready to answer any number of equally simple questions.

At last, "He is my heir—this fellow Cardine," Sir Charles went on. "Some of the property, too, goes to him, but only a little. The rest I can leave as I like. He's the son of my cousin, and the only other Cardine left now. I've never met him. I shouldn't want to now, only I'm dying, and I should have liked to talk to him, to try and persuade him to uphold the family name. If I had found him, and had liked him, it would have made a difference in my will. My wife would not mind. She will be one of the richest widows in England, anyway."

"Don't, oh don't, Charles!" Margaret Cardine's self-control gave way suddenly. With a splendid disregard of the visitor's presence, she bent down, and, almost humbly, kissed the old man's hands, then hurried out of the smoking-room.

"I must apologise, Mr. Raithe. It is the penalty for having led a perfectly selfish life that, when you do get unselfish devotion, you are incapable of appreciating it." Sir Charles broke the awkward silence which followed his wife's flight. "I will not detain you now—you will understand. But I will ask you to come off and see me again to-morrow morning. There are some more things I want to know about

Katu—not personal matters, and I believe you can give me the information. I can count on seeing you then? Perhaps you will lunch with us?"

For a moment Gerald hesitated, as though he would have liked to refuse; then he nodded and took his topee off the table. "Yes. Thanks very much. I will give Lady Cardine's message to Mrs. Blackwood."

His boat was already half-way to the quay when Margaret Cardine returned to the smoking-room, having regained command of herself.

"It's the heat," she said with an apologetic little smile. "Has he gone? Oh, Charles! I ought to have written a note. Whatever will they think of me?"

"I fancy he's a man who will explain satisfactorily, the sort of man to do most things satisfactorily." The old statesman spoke slowly, as though to himself.

His wife, who was looking out through the door towards the town, answered without turning round, "He must be wasted here, then. There can't be much scope for anyone like that in Mati."

Sir Charles knocked the ash off his cigar very carefully. "I'm not so sure about that, my dear. Mr. Raithe has, I fancy, grasped certain very important facts connected with Katu. I have asked him to lunch with us to-morrow."

It seemed as though there was a question

trembling on Lady Cardine's lips, something which she was anxious to ask, yet did not dare to put into words. In the end, however, she returned to his side, and, very gently, re-arranged his pillows.

"It's time you had a sleep," she said. "The doctor will be frightfully cross with me if your temperature runs up as a result of having visitors."

Gerald Raithe was waiting at the landing-stage when the yacht's boat brought Lady Cardine ashore. She was dressed in the simplest of white dresses, with a large topee, yet, somehow, she brought with her an indefinable air of luxurious daintiness. She began with an apology.

"I ought to have written a note. I can't think——"

He stopped her at once. "I told Mrs. Blackwood it was my fault, that I did not wait. She understood. She always says my manners are growing steadily worse."

She gave him a grateful look. It was not necessary for him to tell her that he had said nothing of her agitation that morning.

Then he changed the subject abruptly.

"Mati is not always quite so deserted as this —not a native in sight. As a matter of fact it is a public holiday. They are finishing off yesterday's cock-fights. Otherwise, His Highness the Raja might have paid you a state visit. Pos-

sibly, he will honour you to-morrow, if his health permits it after to-day's—excitement."

"You dislike him?" She glanced up quickly.

Gerald Raithe laughed. "Evidently, I should never make a diplomatist, if you can read my thoughts so quickly. That is the Blackwoods' house. The girl at this end of the veranda is Miss Wrench. We only have four English women in Mati."

"And the other two, shall I meet them?" Really, Margaret Cardine hardly knew why she asked the question.

The man shook his head. "No, we have cliques, even in our tiny community. The other two are not very friendly with us."

She found herself wondering now what he meant by "us." Was he a relation of the Blackwoods, or was he the fiancé of the girl who was introduced to her a moment later? Certainly, Patsy's manner suggested that they were very good friends.

Almost unconsciously, Margaret Cardine was watching them throughout the whole of her visit, though neither her hostess, nor the other guests, suspected anything of the kind. She was gracious, brilliant, entirely unaffected, and as Gerald Raithe, who watched her in turn, was quick to note, she fascinated the women as greatly as she did the men. But there was a hint of sadness running through it all, a kind of echo of what had been said in the smoking-room of the "White

Lady" that morning. The others might miss this, did miss it in fact, but Gerald understood.

Walter Blackwood, the counterpart of his wife, small, alert, bright-eyed; Hubert Wrench, stooping, a little apologetic in his manner; Jack Bartram, and a couple of youngsters from Blackwood's office—the visitor talked to all these in turn; yet, by a kind of common consent, it was left to Gerald Raithe to see her back to her boat, Blackwood having been called away a few minutes before.

Patsy Wrench, who had been unusually subdued all the afternoon, seemed to hesitate, then rose quickly. "I will go too, if I may, Lady Cardine. Gerald won't mind."

Despite herself, Margaret Cardine smiled. So far, she had regarded Miss Wrench as being entirely grown up, a woman in all essentials, but this speech undeceived her. Patsy was a child, after all. Moreover, she knew, instinctively, that the child already worshipped her; and so many women had hated Sir Charles Cardine's wife, for no other cause than the greatest of all causes, envy, that she was ready to repay the worship with love.

But did Gerald Raithe, too, regard Patsy as a child? His manner, as a whole, seemed to suggest that he did, yet, once or twice, Lady Cardine had noticed a look on the face of one or the other which led her to suspect that they shared certain

secrets ; that, when they were alone, they could be serious.

" She loves him—without knowing it is love of that kind ; and, though he would give his life for her, he does not love her a bit—so far." Such was Margaret's summing up as she walked down towards the quay between them—Mati boasted of neither rickshaws nor sedan chairs.

She was almost angry with herself for the interest she was taking in these new acquaintances. Since Sir Charles Cardine had made her his wife, she had ignored the rest of the world. She owed so much to him, that she had no thought to spare for anyone else. She had troubled to make no friends, and her enemies she had treated with contempt ; but these people in Mati seemed different—Gerald Raithe, at least, must be different, or her husband would never have invited him to lunch on board the yacht. The former Secretary for War had never been one to entertain bores. As for the girl, she, too, must be of other clay than the women who had so eagerly seized on every rumour concerning Lady Cardine's past.

Margaret, herself, said little whilst they walked down towards the harbour. Patsy talked very fast, and a little nervously ; Gerald Raithe put in a few words here and there ; but the elder woman listened, or pretended to listen, being busy with her own thoughts.

As they entered the Square, one side of which was formed by the quay, Miss Wrench broke off

suddenly in the middle of a rather vivid sketch of the native character.

"Oh! Why couldn't we have been spared this? I thought they would still be at their hateful cock-fight. . . . Don't let them speak to us, Jerry, please don't."

Gerald turned to Lady Cardine. "It is the Raja and his scallywags—his courtiers, I should say. I am not on the best of terms with him. I am more than sorry we should have met them; but they will not annoy you." He spoke with a kind of stiff anger in his voice.

A dozen figures had just straggled out of a building on their right. In front were the Raja and a couple of white men, whilst behind these came a tail of natives, chattering noisily amongst themselves.

Quite unconsciously, it seemed, Margaret Cardine slipped her arm into that of Patsy Wrench.

"Who are they, dear?" she asked, in a queer, strained voice.

The girl pressed the arm with hers, gently though firmly. "It's only the Raja Ismail, and two of his white hangers-on—that's Jerry's word, but I don't know any other suitable one. They are quite harmless—just now." There was a world of scorn in her voice.

Lady Cardine had pulled herself together, and tried to smile. "It is horrid—white men and a native, arm in arm. Who—who are the white men?"

Patsy answered promptly. "The one on this side, the sober one, is Herr Carl Gunther, our Consul—But, of course, you've seen him. The other is Mr. Albert Darkin, a trader."

"Darkin! What a hideous Sunday School teacher name!" Margaret gave a hollow little laugh, and Gerald, who looked round at her quickly, saw that she was deadly pale.

"You've hit it exactly, Lady Cardine," he drawled. "He comes of some kind of Little Bethel, or Great Ebenezer, stock. One never meets these folk at Home, socially, but you can't help it in a place like this."

"It's the worst of a place like this." Patsy backed him up loyally. "Still, it's not always so bad. They go to the cock-fights, and bet, and drink."

They were now but a few yards from the Raja and his friends. Ismail, who had been staring very hard, exchanged a stiff salute with Gerald Raithe, Carl Gunther, too, raised his topee, but Albert Darkin laughed stupidly, then threw his hat on the ground. Margaret Cardine and her companions were past before he had been persuaded to pick it up again.

"How hateful!" Lady Cardine gave a little shudder. "Did he, that horrid little man with the name, recognise you at all?"

Miss Wrench shook her head decisively. "No, I'm sure he didn't, because, you see, he would have been afraid of what I should have said to

him next time. . . . I always tell people when they misbehave themselves."

"I can quite believe that." Margaret gave a little laugh which had a half-hysterical note of relief in it. "It's nice to be able to do it, dear. . . . Well, here we are at the quay, and my boat is waiting. Thank you all, very, very much, for your kindness. If my husband will stay over to-morrow, I am going to ask you all to come to dinner on board. Thank you again." Then, as if moved by a sudden impulse, she drew the girl towards her, and kissed her very tenderly.

"She's too sweet and lovely for words, Jerry," Patsy exclaimed as they turned back from the landing-stage. "Every one must love her. You would, wouldn't you, Jerry? I mean, of course, if she wasn't married."

Gerald Raithe smiled. "Yes. She's very nice indeed."

"Nice!" The girl echoed his words scornfully. "How can you use such a silly, sloppy sort of word for her! It's what Miss Darkin would say when she meant something catty. But I was surprised at her being so upset over the Raja and Mr. Darkin. It didn't seem like her at all."

As a matter of fact, Gerald himself was puzzled over the same matter; but all he said was, "We are used to their ways, and have got past being disgusted; yet it might strike a stranger very differently, you know."

They walked on a little way in silence, then,

" Jerry, are you going to tell him, Sir Charles Cardine, all about it, about Katu ? It's a splendid chance, because they say he's a very, very great man, and though those wretches are in office now, everybody sensible would listen to him. Do be sure and speak to him, Jerry." Miss Wrench's voice was very eager.

Gerald nodded. " I'm going to tell him to-morrow," he said.

" Tell her too—Lady Cardine, I mean." The girl laid a little brown hand on his arm. " She would admire you ever so much for it. And Jerry, Jerry dear, be careful. Ismail means mischief. Gunther and Darkin are setting him on. I do wish I could come and guard you whilst you're asleep. I seem to see a horrible little native stealing into your room with a kris in his hand."

The man flushed suddenly. Words rose to his lips, words which, if spoken, would have made all the difference, not only in their lives, but in the lives of many others, as well. But before he could frame them, Mrs. Blackwood hailed them from the veranda of her house.

" Of course you are going to stay here for dinner, children. I have made sure of Mr. Bartram already, and I'm not going to let you two go."

## CHAPTER V

### GERALD RAITHE'S DECISION

It was past midnight when Gerald Raithe and Bartram left the Blackwoods' house. Patsy had gone home some time previously, taking her father with her, but the others had remained, sitting on the veranda in the moonlight, smoking, and discussing the events of the day.

"Curious thing Sir Charles Cardine putting in here," Blackwood had remarked. "I wonder what his object is?"

He had glanced inquiringly at Gerald, but the latter had volunteered no information of any sort. Sir Charles's quest for the heir to the title was the old man's own affair.

"She's ripping, Gerald," Bartram said suddenly. He had changed into pyjamas, and had come into Gerald's room for a last whisky before turning in.

His host looked up from the soda-water bottle he was opening. "Who's ripping? Lady Cardine or Mrs. Blackwood?"

"No, Miss Wrench, of course," the other answered. "They're decent, of course, the elder

women, but not like her. It's rough having a father of that sort. She only just got him away in time to-night. One more glass——" he shrugged his shoulders expressively, lighted a cigarette, then went on—"Did you know the mother?"

Gerald shook his head. "She died when Patty was born, I believe."

"Is he any good at business?" Bartram was evidently interested in the matter, for he stuck to it, despite his host's rather short answers.

"He's been here twenty years, and he knows the natives better than anyone else; and they know him. Since he joined Blackwood, who has capital and brains, they have done very well; but Patsy has known what it is to be short of money," the reply came slowly. "I wish for her sake, he wasn't mixed up with Ismail."

Jack Bartram's surprise showed in his face. "Is he? I shouldn't have thought that."

"Perhaps not. But it's as well to warn you," Gerald retorted. "The Palace crowd gets hold of him, and makes a fool of him whenever it can. That is His Highness' idea of being humorous—a drunken white man . . . Well, good-night."

Bartram went to his own room, which was next door, and turned in under the mosquito curtains; but he could not sleep. There seemed so much to think about. It was only a week since he had landed in Katu as representative of the Pepper Trust. He had been warned that Mati

was the dullest, hottest spot in the Malay Archipelago, and had been advised to cut his visit as short as possible. Yet, already, he had found it full of interest. Almost the first man he had met on landing had been his old acquaintance, Gerald Raithe, then had come a glimpse of the intrigues carried on at the Palace, the bitter, scarcely-veiled, enmity between the various members of the white community, and now Patsy Wrench had, in a few brief hours, altered his outlook completely.

He did not attempt to argue with himself, to persuade himself that it was absurd to fall in love at first sight; instead, he accepted the fact gladly. It was a privilege to worship her. Yet one thing worried him, the same question which had puzzled Lady Cardine that afternoon—what was the relationship between Gerald and Miss Wrench? Were they in love with one another? Were they even engaged already? Had he, himself, come on the scene too late to have any chance at all? So far as society in the island was concerned, Gerald was his only possible rival.

Phew! How hot it was! As a rule, he could sleep anywhere, but now it appeared to be useless even to close his eyes. He had only a thin sheet over him, but this seemed too much. He kicked it aside, and then the mosquito curtains were stifling him. Sitting up, he was just about to lift these, when, through the French window, he caught sight of something on the veranda, something creeping along, past his room, towards

Gerald's. In an instant, he was on his feet, revolver in hand, but when he reached the veranda the crawling figure had disappeared.

"Gerald, look out!"

As he shouted, Bartram sprang to the French window. It was too dark to see into the room, but he heard the mosquito curtains torn away, heard Gerald give a cry; then a small brown figure sprang at him, sending him staggering backwards, and knocking the revolver out of his hand. He clutched at it, but his grasp slipped off the oiled skin.

"Are you hurt?" It was Gerald asking anxiously. Jack shook his head. "No," he gasped. "A bit winded. I hope he didn't steal anything?"

"He didn't come to steal," the other answered gravely,—"He came to murder me. I owe my life to you. . . . No, he didn't touch me. You woke me just in time."

They went back into Gerald's room, and lighted the lamp. The mosquito curtains were ripped right off the framework—the would-be murderer had not reckoned on them—and, rolled up in them, they found his long dagger.

Bartram swallowed a stiff whisky and soda at one draught—he was far more shaken than the man who had just had so narrow an escape—then, "Yes, it was murder the little devil meant," he said slowly. "But why? Was it Ismail's doing?"

Gerald shrugged his shoulders—"Who can say? It may have been Gunther, or both. But this wasn't brought on by what I said yesterday. It goes back much further than that. I think, in fact I feel sure, they don't want me to meet Sir Charles Cardine again."

"What the dickens has he got to do with it all?" There was very real amazement in Jack Bartram's voice.

Before he answered, Gerald got up and closed the windows. "It's not likely that there would be anyone listening, but I won't risk it. Have a cheroot, and then, if you're not in a hurry to turn in, I'll tell you. No one knows it—knows my side of it—except Miss Wrench."

A quarter of an hour later, Jack Bartram held out his hand impulsively—"By Jove," he said, "I never even suspected such a thing. I'm with you, all through. But will you rouse our Government at Home to take it up?"

Gerald Raithe yawned. "Probably not. But in that case——" he paused, as though still uncertain whether he should commit himself.

"Well, in that case?" the other man's voice was eager.

"In that case, I shall try and do it myself," for once the speaker did not drawl his words. "And now you had better go and turn in. . . . Oh, by the way, don't mention the little business about that Thug to any one, to any one at all. It might alarm people unnecessarily."

Long after Bartram had finally gone to sleep, Gerald Raithe was still sitting in his long bamboo chair, smoking.

"She was nearer the truth than she thought," he muttered. "It would never do to let her know, poor kiddie. . . . Oh, well, I suppose I must exceed my allowance again. It's my only chance of rest, and I want to be fit to-morrow." He sighed, took a tiny pill out of a box, looked at it a moment with obvious disfavour, then swallowed it with some soda-water. A few moments later, he was sleeping peacefully, his window open again, as though Mati was the safest and best-policed town in the world.

In the morning, Mati had resumed its work-a-day aspect. The stores and offices were open, a few natives were lounging about, a few carts were being unloaded down at the quay, and quite a number of the fishermen were out in the bay.

Gerald went down to his warehouse, a big stone building fronting on the quay, exchanged a few words with his manager, a smiling, bespectacled Chinese, then strolled across to the office of Messrs. Blackwood and Wrench. Rather to his relief, only the senior partner was in. Gerald dropped into one of the big chairs, helped himself to a cheroot, then—

"Will you buy my business, Blackwood?" he asked.

The Shipping Agent sat up straight in his chair.

"What the deuce do you mean, Jerry?" he asked.

"What I say," Gerald retorted. "I know you want to have a cut at the trading, and, as I'm giving it up, I thought you might like to acquire a going concern. We shouldn't quarrel over terms. You and Wrench know exactly what it's worth."

Walter Blackwood's eyes sparkled. No proposition could have suited him better from a business point of view, and yet his dominant feeling was one of regret.

"Does that mean you're leaving us, old man? I hope not!"

Gerald nodded. "Leaving for a time, at any rate. What's more, the sooner I get away the better I shall be pleased."

"I'm very sorry. Alice will be too—and one or two others." He gave Gerald a keen glance. "One or two others. . . . Yes. I'll buy your business—to-day, if you like. But how about the 'Zeta'? Is she for sale, too?" mentioning a hundred ton schooner which Gerald used for trading round the island. She had been built for a yacht, and was still a very serviceable craft, her owner having had her fitted quite recently with an auxiliary oil engine.

Gerald shook his head. "No, I shall keep her—at least, for a bit. Anyway, you wouldn't want her, as you've got the 'Marmion' already. Well, roughly, I think my lot is worth about

twenty thousand dollars. You had better come and see the books and stock as soon as possible."

"This afternoon, will that do?" Blackwood's voice was a little eager. He had expected the price to be a good deal higher.

For a moment, Gerald hesitated. "No. I'm lunching on the yacht, and I may not be back. Say to-morrow morning, about seven o'clock. All right then," he rose to go, as though they had been discussing some merely trivial matter, then he paused. "Look here, Blackwood, don't mention this yet, to anyone. I'd sooner tell them. Make Wrench understand that, too."

Blackwood had risen also. His manner was a little nervous now. "I don't want to be inquisitive, Jerry; but this is a bit sudden. Is it—is it anything that can be put right, so that we could get you to stay? We'll all be awfully sorry. I know, of course, you've been butting up against Gunther and Ismail, but they wouldn't scare you off. . . . Alice has got a lot of influence with Patsy;" he blurted out the last words awkwardly.

"Thanks very much," Gerald answered quietly. "No, Patsy and I are good friends as we were when she was a kiddie of fourteen. I shall tell her all about it myself to-night."

When the door had closed behind his visitor, Walter Blackwood sat down again with a very puzzled look on his face.

" What the deuce does it mean ? " he muttered. " What's he going to say to the child to-night ? I suppose Alice will declare I've messed it all up, if it goes wrong."

It was half-past twelve when Gerald Raithe stepped on to the gangway of the " White Lady." Hitherto he had rather prided himself on the smartness of his boat's crew, and the general appearance of the craft herself, but now these seemed suddenly to have lost their value to him. His discipline was as nothing compared with that of Captain Simpson. In Mati, the Blackwoods and their circle tried to make the best of things, to keep up the traditions—it is only in South Africa that, for some inscrutable reason, the Home-born man sinks to the level of the country-born. They dressed for dinner, they insisted on clean linen, they observed rigidly the customs of their kind, but on the yacht these things seemed to come naturally, without an effort. An Albert Darkin and a Carl Gunther sitting down to dinner in shirt-sleeves, with a native or two as guests, seemed grotesque improbabilities.

Margaret Cardine met him on the upper deck. " My husband is asleep," she said, as she led the way into one of the most perfectly furnished boudoirs Gerald had ever seen, perfect alike in its simplicity and in the quality of the materials used. Sir Charles Cardine was one of the wealthiest men in England, and he had never appreci-

ated the fact so greatly as when he had set to work to refit the yacht for his wife.

" You may smoke, Mr. Raithe," Lady Cardine put the cigarette box on the table beside her guest, took a cigarette herself, then sank into a deep chair. " Yes, he seems better," she went on, " I think you had a good effect on him. He is quite looking forward to a talk with you after lunch."

Once more, Gerald was conscious of a sense of shyness in her presence. " Has he been ill long ? " he asked.

Margaret raised her eyebrows slightly. " I thought perhaps you knew. It's six months now, since we were certain ; and, and——" she looked away ; " we know—he knows too—there isn't any chance of recovery. Everything has been tried."

He did not attempt to offer her any sympathy of the conventional kind. Instead, he sat quiet until she spoke again, calmly.

" Your little town is awfully fascinating, Mr. Raithe—at any rate, to a visitor. And you were all so kind, especially Miss Wrench. She is pretty now, but she will make a very beautiful woman, and a very sweet one."

Gerald looked genuinely pleased. " The kiddie and I are great chums. She's clever, too, cleverer than any of the others, men or women. And you can trust her absolutely, though she is only a child."

"Only a child!" Margaret Cardine echoed his words and smiled. "She might be cross if she heard that. . . . And the other man, the curious person who threw his hat down, have you seen him to-day?"

It seemed to Gerald that she put the question a little nervously, and he found himself wondering why she should have referred to the incident again. "Mr. Darkin and I are not likely to ask after one another's health," he answered grimly. "I have recently threatened to give him a hiding."

The woman leaned forward eagerly. "Why was that, Mr. Raithe?"

"He said something I didn't like," the reply came rather stiffly.

Margaret ignored the stiffness. "Do you usually give hidings to people who say things you don't like?" she asked.

"When they say them about my friends, and they belong to that class. You can't fight them, you see; and gentlemen don't do it, or, if they do happen to make a mistake, they apologise." There was almost boyish simplicity and directness in the answer. He was stating what was, to him, a matter of faith, about which there could be no question.

Margaret rested her chin on her hands and fixed her glorious eyes on his face; but there was nothing that was not entirely womanly and open in her gaze. "It's nice to find people who

believe those things—nowadays," she spoke very slowly. "They don't teach them, except in a few schools . . . and the world laughs at them, because they don't mean money. Women say things to hurt, and men repeat them and laugh . . . I know. . . . And who is this Mr. Barking?" The last question came with rather surprising suddenness.

"Darkin," he corrected her. "He's one of the 'Good Darkins'—you must have heard of them. 'Darkin's starch with a prayer on the wrapper. Send fifty wrappers and you get a hymn book.' Joseph Darkin, the elder brother, is Under-Secretary for something in the present Government. He's a great teetotaler—like this one. Sir Charles must know him, at least by sight."

Lady Cardine rose abruptly. "Lunch ought to be ready now." She touched a bell, then, "Mr. Raithe, may I beg you not to mention the name of Darkin to my husband? He is an old man, but he is the greatest Englishman alive." She flung the words out proudly, superbly, and Gerald, who had risen too, bowed in acquiescence. "And it is torture to him even to think of men like that being allowed to disgrace the country. Oh, if there was only another real man, best of all another Cardine, who could carry on his work, it would ease his mind tremendously."

Gerald was staring out of the door now, towards the town. "And the heir to the title, is he no good?" he asked very quietly.

"I have never heard of his doing anything, good or bad; so he can't be a worthy successor to my husband. . . . Yes, Tomlinson?" She broke off as a grave English manservant with grey side-whiskers appeared in the doorway.

"Lunch is ready, my lady," he announced in a voice which, to Gerald's ears, seemed to be charged equally with affection and respect.

## CHAPTER VI

### MARGARET GUESSES CORRECTLY

SIR CHARLES CARDINE was lunching in the smoking-room, consequently, besides Gerald and his hostess, there were only the skipper and the doctor in the saloon. As a rule, Margaret herself had her meals with Sir Charles, and her unexpected appearance on this occasion served to throw Captain Simpson into an almost pitiable state of nervousness. He would have risked anything for her, have laid down his life for her gladly, have died perfectly happy, feeling he had done his duty. Yet, somehow, her actual presence upset his balance completely. The doctor, on the other hand, was a silent, elderly Scotsman, whom nothing was likely to disturb. When Lady Cardine introduced them, he glanced keenly at Gerald from under his heavy eyebrows, held out a firm, strong hand, then seemed to lose all interest in him.

The meal was perfectly cooked, perfectly served, and Margaret was an ideal hostess, but it was not until Gerald made a chance reference to the

"Zeta," that they managed to draw Captain Simpson into the conversation.

At the mention of the schooner, however, the skipper pricked up his ears:

"Is she yours, Mr. Raithe?" he asked. "I wondered where she had got to. Sir Charles might remember her," he turned to Lady Cardine. "She was built for his cousin, Colonel Cardine, your ladyship . . . funny thing she should be down here when we turn up."

Gerald nodded. "Yes, I bought her a year or two ago. She has suited my purpose admirably, especially since I had her altered," then, rather abruptly, he switched the conversation off on to the subject of the sea gipsies of Katu.

"You don't like our Orang Laut—our local pirates, Captain Simpson?" he remarked.

The skipper was in his element now. But for Lady Cardine's presence, he would have said some distinctly forcible things concerning the character of the Sea-Malays; as it was, he contented himself with telling various stories, in which quite unconsciously he figured as the hero. Both Margaret and Gerald were able easily to fill in the gaps he left.

"I never heard Captain Simpson talk so much," Lady Cardine said, as she led the way to the smoking-room, "there must be some magic about you, Mr. Raithe. I ought to congratulate you, for there is no man for whom I have a higher esteem than Joseph Simpson. I rank him amongst

my friends. The number of those is not large," she added, with something very like a sigh.

Sir Charles Cardine was propped up with pillows. He had the inevitable cigar between his fingers, and there was a grim twisted smile on his face as he welcomed his guest. A stranger, a man not belonging to his class, might have likened him to some ancient bird of prey, too old to fly himself, yet able still to appreciate the flights of others; but to Gerald Raithe he was the great ex-Minister, the man who might still have been a Minister had he not married the woman who was now Lady Cardine, a greater man than if he had been Premier—greater, because he had won the love of Margaret Cardine.

"I'm glad you have come, Mr. Raithe," the old man waved him to a chair close beside his own couch. "Yesterday, you answered my questions about the heir to my title, to my complete satisfaction," he paused, and gave Gerald one of his rare smiles. "We've done with that. To-day, I want you to tell me about Katu. I am on the shelf myself, but it is still possible that I could do a last service for our country. My wife"—he put a world of tenderness and respect into those two words—"my wife shares all my secrets, and whether you say things to her or to me, makes no difference. . . . Now, as to the island of Katu, I have the map ready here. You said enough yesterday to lead me to think that you

have more to say—things which are worth hearing."

Gerald flushed. He knew that Margaret Cardine, who was standing, as usual, behind her husband's couch, was watching him keenly, and he knew, too, the measure of the old man who was questioning him.

He pushed the map to one side. "It does not need that, sir," he spoke slowly, though without a trace of his usual drawl. "You know the map as well as I do. Katu is on the main track, the Highway of the East. If a rival power—Germany, for instance—seized Katu, our control of the trade route would be threatened. I have knocked about the world enough to know that, in spite of all the rot that's talked about "Britains Over-seas," Singapore and Hong-Kong are of more importance to us than all the self-governing colonies put together."

Sir Charles smiled grimly. "Isn't that treason —against latter-day ideas? I'm too old and too weary to keep pace with those; and too old-fashioned to allow a Colonial politician to dictate to me. . . . I fancy we agree there; you're a Public School man." It was a statement of fact, not a question. "But Katu would be valuable to Germany only as a naval base," and he nodded in the direction of the town, "Mati would hardly do for that, there is not enough water."

"But there is Sudang, on the north coast."

Gerald's voice was eager now. "Sudang is one of the finest harbours in the world—one of the easiest to fortify. The entrance is narrow, the north head is a cliff—an ideal place for a battery, whilst inland you come at once on the foot hills of Kini Dah, the great volcano. This is a rough plan of the place." He took a paper from his pocket, unfolded it and handed it to his host.

The former Secretary for War examined it carefully, then put it down on the table in front of him.

"I could wish, Mr. Raithe," he said slowly, "I could wish that this had come before me when I was in office. The suggested positions for your guns are admirable. It was not always possible to say that of the plans made by my professional advisers."

Gerald flushed with pleasure, and, happening to look up, he received a frank smile of encouragement from Margaret Cardine. It was not Sir Charles' custom to praise any man's work without a cause.

"But what do you propose to do? Katu is independent, so far. There is not even a Protectorate over it?" The question came sharply.

The younger man had his answer ready. "Katu is bankrupt. The Raja is a drunken young reprobate: the misgovernment is appalling. It would be a perfectly simple matter to find an excuse for intervention. After that, the rest would be easy. But there is no time to waste.

The Germans are already a move ahead, working in their slow, cautious manner."

"Ah, I feared so." Sir Charles looked up from the cigar he was cutting, "That German acting as British Consul suggested as much. How far has it gone?"

Gerald shrugged his shoulders. "It is difficult to say exactly. Messrs. Gunther and Schultz have lent Ismail more money than the firm ever possessed, far more, and in return they've got several monopolies, liquor and opium, for instance. Whilst our people have been asleep, Ismail has fallen into their hands."

The ex-Minister drummed on the table with the fingers of his sound hand. "That seems to settle it, doesn't it? What would you do, Mr. Raithe?"

Gerald did not hesitate. "Jump on him with both feet. There are lots of things against him, fair excuses. Half his people are pirates, and he encourages them, though they never touch German ships. Then there was the case of an English girl brought here a few months ago, sent from Hamburg on one of Gunther's steamers."

Margaret Cardine gave a little cry of horror. "Oh, Mr. Raithe! Is she there still, on shore?"

Gerald had gone white now, and his hand was shaking, with anger at the memory. "No," he answered in a low voice. "She was never landed. Blackwood and—one or two others found out in time. But we're not sure if hers

was the only case. Like so many of his countrymen, Gunther is—in that trade."

"I know about—that trade." It was Sir Charles speaking. "We were going to bring in a Bill to stop it. Our successors have other things to think of, and they hate to offend the foreigner. . . . But was this before the man Gunther was made Consul?"

The trader nodded. "Just before. Mr. Lecher, M.P., was here when it happened."

Lady Cardine's eyes blazed. "And he knew?" she cried.

"He knew," Gerald answered gravely. "He quarrelled with one of the men who interfered over it, and got hurt—with a whip."

In spite of her anger, Margaret could not help smiling, remembering something which had been said in her boudoir before lunch. "As an Englishwoman, I should like to thank the man with the whip."

There was, however, no smile on Sir Charles Cardine's face. "If, in spite of that, Gunther was still appointed Consul, what chance will you have of inducing the persons now in office"—the ex-Minister had always been a fierce fighter, with no forgiveness for his political foes—"to establish a protectorate here against the wishes of Germany? This I will tell you—I had rather an efficient Secret Service when I was at the War Office; and I learnt why there was a big strike, which crippled our coal supply, at the very

moment Germany was threatening us with war. Your friend, Mr. Lecher, knows how many marks go to a sovereign . . . I would have hanged them all," his eyes blazed fiercely, " yet you're going to break your heart for nothing."

Gerald set his face doggedly. " At any rate, I shall go Home and try. I have already arranged to sell my business. I fixed it up to-day."

" You will fail completely." The old man shook his head. " You won't even succeed in getting the opposition Press, our Press, to help you. Remember, you will land at the beginning of the cricket season. I speak from experience. You will fail—and what then ? "

His guest looked him in the eyes fairly and squarely. " Then I shall come back and annex Katu myself."

Margaret Cardine drew a quick breath and her wonderful face glowed, but she did not speak. Gerald, who happened to look up, caught her expression and flushed, then, once more, he was watching Sir Charles, waiting for the veteran's answer. It came slowly.

" I remember Raja Brooke. He did it ; but those days were different. Our temper was different, too, and we hadn't let Germany grow unhealthily big. . . . You'll fail, Gerald Raithe ; but it will be worth trying, and, by God, if I were your age, I would try." His fine, rugged old face was afire now. " By God, I would try, if only as an example for the nation."

For a minute, there was silence, perhaps because the air was too heavily charged with excitement, and, during the pause, Margaret Cardine slipped out of the smoking-room.

At last, "You will want money, plenty of it," the old man said gruffly.

Gerald nodded. "I have a little, and I have the yacht, the 'Zeta.' I may get some rich men to help me."

"Yes. That is possible, quite possible," Sir Charles answered. "I can, I think, give you letters to men who will do it." He paused and stared out of the door; then, suddenly, "You're damnably like your father was, Gerald Raithe," he said. "But you're like your mother, too."

Gerald, who had gone white under his tan, nodded. "Is that so?" he asked in a very low voice.

"Your father and I quarrelled—over your mother." The old statesman was speaking jerkily. "It was a mistake. I wish they had lived—both—till now."

Before Gerald could reply, Margaret Cardine returned. "It is time you rested, dear," she said. "You've talked far longer than you have done for months."

The old man gave a wry smile, yet he submitted with a docility which proved far more plainly than words could have done, how weak he really was.

"Don't leave the ship, though, Mr. Raithe,"

he said, as his visitor rose. "I want to have another talk with you about that matter. And time may be short. My wife will entertain you."

Gerald hesitated, and Margaret, who happened to be watching him, saw his hand go to the small pocket in his white jacket. A curious look, a compound of anxiety and disappointment, crossed his face.

"I can come back later," he began.

But Sir Charles insisted. "Please remain. I have so little time, and there is a great deal more I want to learn from you. I ask it—as a favour."

It was five minutes later when Margaret joined him on deck. "We will have tea under the awning abaft the saloon," she said. "It's cooler there, and you can see your prospective kingdom." She smiled, and yet there was no hint of mockery in her words.

Captain Simpson joined them at tea, by Lady Cardine's request. He sat on the edge of his chair, perspired rather fully, and did not remain very long, alleging that he wanted to stretch his legs ashore.

When the skipper had gone. "You may smoke, of course, Mr. Raithe," Margaret said, then she herself lighted a cigarette.

For a time, little was said. A change had come over Gerald. All his animation had departed. He looked worn and ill at ease, whilst, every now and then, his fingers went to his lips nervously.

It seemed to be an effort for him to answer his hostess, although she tried hard to take the whole burden of conversation on herself. She was watching him very carefully, anxiously even ; and, at last, she seemed to come to some decision. Taking a little silver-mounted bottle from her pocket, she held it out to him.

" These are quarter-grain pills, Mr. Raithe," she said, in a queer strained voice. " Forgive me ; but I think I am right. You left yours on shore, and you didn't expect to remain here so long."

Gerald stared at her with a mixture of amazement and shame on his face. " How did you know ? " he whispered hoarsely. " How did I give myself away ? No one else even suspects." But he took the bottle with a trembling hand, extracted one of the tiny pills, and swallowed it.

Margaret was watching him with infinite compassion in her eyes. " It will act soon," she murmured. " Don't worry. I know the signs, because, like you, I'm always fighting the horrible thing."

She dropped her cigarette into the ash tray, lighted another, and that, too, was finished before either of them spoke again. Then Gerald faced her—the normal Gerald, cool, collected, master of himself.

" I began taking morphia two years ago—the doctor prescribed it for a complaint I had, after-effects of influenza—and it has gone on. I

can't stop." He made his confession quietly, in an even voice.

Margaret looked away. "It was practically the same with me . . . Sir Charles knows . . . But you're keeping it down, aren't you? You're not increasing the dose?" She faced him now, with almost pitiful eagerness.

The man seemed to hesitate. "Fairly well. But it'll beat me. I know it will. That's why I want to do something useful, at once, before it's too late. . . . Things might have been so different; but with a curse like that on one—" He broke off abruptly, and began to cut a cigar with unnecessary care.

She choked back a sob. Surely he must be referring to Patsy Wrench. "It is never too late," she whispered. "I have kept it down, kept the doses down, and I am going to beat it yet. So will you . . . Action, excitement, this splendid scheme of yours—you have the chance there. You won't let it go, will you? Promise you won't. You will fight it off and be your own master again. It is only the coward who gives way, who says he can't help himself—and so won't help himself. Promise, Mr. Raithe. Promise me."

She was a beautiful woman always, but at that moment her beauty verged on the Divine. It was the beauty of the mother, absolutely pure. It was the mother-instinct in her crying out, the longing to protect this man, to save him from him-

self, even as though he had been her own child. There was no sense of sex. He needed help, and she knew how to help him.

She, too, had been through it, and she judged him as only those who have suffered can judge —and who should judge save those who understand? She saw that he had reached the stage when the fear and hatred of the drug, not the drug itself, were beginning to overcome him. What he had to do he felt must be done quickly, whilst his strength and intellect lasted—and after that the deluge. He looked forward to no future beyond the next few months.

"Promise me." Her voice was low, though insistent. "Promise. I have done it, and you can do it, too. You must do it. So long as you don't increase the doses, you are conquering it."

He had been staring at the deck, as though unwilling to meet her eyes. His cigar had gone out unheeded; his whole attitude seemed to tell of misery, of shame even. But now he looked up, and faced her squarely.

"I had lost hope. I was going to use the morphia to keep me going—for this thing, just for this thing. But I'll promise you. I've never," he hesitated a little, as though at a loss for words. "There's never been anyone I could talk to—about it. Anyone who would understand. You're different."

Margaret Cardine coloured now—as a woman; then she held out her hand. "You will keep

that promise." She spoke calmly and confidently. "But you will not give up your scheme?"

"No. I shall go on with that. Yesterday morning it was a vague dream; but much has happened since then. Now, it is a definite purpose."

This time she did not answer him. She understood, far better than he did, what had wrought the change; and from the bottom of her heart she pitied him.

## CHAPTER VII

### MISS WRENCH IS TROUBLED

In the end, Gerald Raithe left the yacht without seeing his host again.

The doctor came aft, a worried look on his face. "Sir Charles' temperature has raced up to 103°, Lady Cardine," he said, "and I'm afraid he's wandering a bit."

Margaret rose quickly. "I must go to him at once."

Her guest, who had risen too, held out his hand. "Good-bye, Lady Cardine. Perhaps to-morrow——"

"Yes, to-morrow. I know he is anxious to see you again." She finished the sentence for him. "Thank you so much—and remember," then she was gone.

The doctor looked at Gerald curiously. "I am afraid you have an exciting effect on my patient, Mr. Raithe. I'm not so sure about to-morrow. Don't count on it."

When Gerald landed, a quarter of an hour later, instead of going to his store, he went straight to

the Wrenches' bungalow, which was a new one, at the back of the town.

Patsy, who was sitting on the veranda, reading, rose eagerly to meet him.

"I didn't expect to see you at this time of day," she said. "I was just going to have some tea."

The man laughed. "You usually are going to have tea." Then he drew a chair up beside hers and relapsed into silence.

At the end of a couple of minutes the girl began to tap impatiently on the arm of her chair with her fingers. "What's the matter, Jerry? You didn't leave your business to look after itself, and come up here, just for the pleasure of staring at Mati harbour."

Gerald started. As a matter of fact, he had been staring at the "White Lady" and wondering what was happening aboard her.

"No, I came to see you," he answered. "I've made up my mind at last, Patsy."

She leaned forward slightly, unconsciously gripping the arms of her chair. Had he been looking at her, he would have seen in her eyes something he had never seen there before.

"Yes?" She wanted him to go on.

"I'm going Home. Blackwood has arranged to buy my business." He was still looking towards the harbour.

Patsy's grip on the arm of the chair loosened; in fact, all the animation seemed to go out of her suddenly, and she shrank back on to her

cushions, very white in the face. All at once, she had become a woman, and yet she was still young enough to be unable to control her expression.

But the man did not appear to notice anything. "Matters have reached a climax, Patsy," he went on. "If I delay, it may be too late. I spoke to Sir Charles Cardine about it."

She pulled herself together wonderfully.

"What did he say?" she asked in an even voice.

"That I shall fail, that no one will listen to me. I suppose he knows. Still, I'm going on with it, anyhow, as you always said I ought to." He spoke as quietly as she did, apparently without enthusiasm. He had expected her to be pleased, to ask a number of eager questions, and her manner had chilled him. Somehow, he could not understand it. This was not the Patsy he knew.

"Yes, I always said so. I hope I advised you rightly. Of course I'm sorry you're going. . . . We've been such good friends, haven't we, Jerry?"

He looked at her with a smile, the old smile she loved so well. "We always shall be friends," he answered. "Besides, I shall be back, in any case. If I manage to move the Government to take over the island, I shall come back to watch; if they refuse, I shall come back as a filibuster, and force them to move. In that event, I shall

give you ample warning. It might not be safe for you to remain here. You know all my plans."

There was a curious constraint in their conversation, a note which had never been there before. He had meant to tell her so much more, and there were so many questions she wanted to put to him; yet each seemed to have a difficulty in finding words.

"I shall go as soon as possible. I've told no one else yet, except Blackwood, and he doesn't know the reason, of course. Naturally, I came straight to you, because, you see——" He broke off rather lamely.

"We've always been good friends." She finished the sentence for him. "But didn't you tell her, Lady Cardine?"

Gerald flushed. He had been taking Margaret Cardine as part of his scheme, not as some one outside it. "Oh, I thought you would understand she was in it. She was there when we talked it over."

Miss Wrench's eyes glistened. She herself was not one of his counsellors now, yet forty-eight hours previously, she had been Jerry's only confidante. She stood up wearily.

"I've got a headache, Jerry, an awful one. Will you excuse me? You can tell me the rest later, if you've time before you leave. I do hope you'll be successful, because it'll be such a splendid thing, and—and because I've thought of it so

much." She tried hard to keep the sobs out of her voice, then, without another word, she hurried into the bungalow.

The man turned away slowly. He understood now—perhaps at the back of his mind he had understood all along. "I didn't think she cared, at least in that way. It wouldn't have been fair before, and it would be impossible now. . . . I'm sorry."

He reproached himself bitterly, as he walked down to his own house—the more bitterly, perhaps, because no one else could possibly condemn him. He had been perfectly clean and straight in all his dealings with Patsy, in all his thoughts of her. He had known her first as a mere child; and, even after she had become his confidante in his scheme for securing the annexation of Katu—a scheme which owed a great deal to her encouragement — he had continued to regard her as a child in all else but that.

Really, it was more her scheme than his, he told himself now. Her indignation over the ways of the itinerant member of Parliament, William Lecher, had been poured into Gerald's ears, and he, in turn, had told her of the supreme importance of the apparently unimportant island, of his hopes of being able, sooner or later, to move the British Government, of the agencies he already had at work.

"If they won't listen to you, you must do as

Raja Brooke did in Borneo," she had flashed out. " I will help you with all my might."

He had not laughed ; instead, he had taken her words seriously, and, since then, they had gone over the plan time after time. On those occasions, he had treated her as a loyal partner, apparently without any thought of sex ; whilst, when others had been present, she had been his little chum, who, but a few short years before, had been wont to come to him with all her childish troubles.

True, though he had been blind concerning any possible danger to her, latterly, it had needed all his strength of mind to keep his thoughts from dwelling on what she would be like when she became a woman. He was more fond of her than anyone else in the world, and, at any time during the last six months, his fondness might have changed to love, had it not been for his horror of the drug he was taking, his feeling that it was hopeless ever to think of escaping from it. He had made up his mind, with a grim despair which had something heroic in it, that his career was virtually finished, that his attempt to secure the annexation of Katu would be the last thing he would do ; consequently, it was utterly impossible for him to think of marriage with Patsy Wrench. Up till now, he had believed that she did not care for him, except as a friend ; and now his eyes had been opened, with almost tragic suddenness.

He threw himself into a long bamboo chair at the corner of the veranda, behind the lattice-work screen, and tried to think it out. What would Margaret Cardine say? She had told him that there was hope, after all, that he would fight the horror which, through no fault of his own—save, perhaps, the fault of ignorance—had him in its grip, that he could conquer it finally.

If Lady Cardine was right, that would mean he could still ask Patsy to be his wife—and, now, he did not want to do that. Everything seemed to have changed for him since the " White Lady " had steamed into Mati Harbour.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MATI CLUB

The Mati Club stands at the lower corner of the Square, opposite the Raja's palace. Built originally by an enterprising Arab merchant, who had arrived in the island penniless, and had ended up as Prime Minister to Ismail's great grandfather, it had been designed with a view to defence, a wise precaution, as it turned out, for though the Chinese had sacked it in the days of Raja Seyid, it had withstood two attacks at the hands of Sea-Malays from other islands; in addition to proving a convenient place of refuge during various local disturbances.

The Club, then newly formed, took it over after the last owner, a Chinese trader, had been found in bed with his head severed from his body—he had refused a loan to the Regent, Ismail's uncle, and two Chinamen and a Filipino were executed for the crime, being the latest arrivals in the island, and having no known friends; but, as the Club was international and presumably mutual, it had no need of defensive works; consequently, a number of new windows

had been thrown out, and a big veranda made, overlooking the Harbour.

Though every white man in Katu was eligible for membership, and practically all took advantage of the fact, paying subscriptions occasionally, the list of members had never exceeded forty, of whom the British and Germans together contributed more than half. Skippers of vessels visiting the port—white skippers, of course—were invariably made honorary members, and more than one vessel had been delayed in consequence. The Club was nothing, if not hospitable.

The election of Club officials was always a delicate question, owing to international rivalries, and the fact of Messrs. Gunther and Schultz holding the liquor monopoly for the island had not tended to simplify matters, Gunther having contrived to get himself elected chairman just before the edict was made public. Gerald Raithe, who had been Honorary Secretary for the past three years, had immediately resigned, despite the protests of the other British members, and, after a hotly-contested election, young Locock, Blackwood's nephew, had been chosen to fill his place, narrowly defeating Albert Darkin, the nominee of the German party, who knew it was useless to run one of their own nation as candidate.

Whilst Gerald was sitting alone on his veranda, miserably debating the question of Patsy Wrench,

the greater part of the male white population was assembled in the Club, partaking of appetisers. As a rule, subjects of conversation were distinctly scarce in Mati—that is, subjects which you could discuss in public without running the risk of offending some of your hearers; consequently, the arrival of the "White Lady" had seemed to be little short of a god-send. . . .

"I saw Raithe go off there this morning. He stayed to tiffin; but when Ismail paid a State visit later, he did not even go aboard." It was Daddy Mallowe, the ex-British Consul, who spoke.

Albert Darkin put down his iced lemon squash.

"Mr. Raithe seems highly favoured by Lady Cardine"; he rubbed his hands gently and smiled. "It is something to have a way with the ladies. But the Raja asked for Sir Charles Cardine and was told that he was too ill to see any one." His voice was clear, almost piercing, and every other man in the smoking-room caught his words.

Instantly, all heads were turned in the direction of the speaker. There was a quarrel of long-standing between him and Daddy Mallowe, and the speech sounded very like a challenge.

Mallowe's rugged old face grew dark. "Gerald Raithe is a favourite with all decent people," he began, but John Halton, the American pepper-planter, managed to cut in. He had only just come down from his pepper gardens, and he affected not to know the news.

"Who is this Sir Charles Cardine, anyway, Walter?" he turned to Blackwood, who had strolled up to the bar, in the interests of peace. "Seems to me I've heard a saying about the 'Cardine Way.'"

Blackwood laughed a little nervously. He had just noticed Captain Simpson entering the big room, and the red-headed skipper looked like a man who would easily take offence. "'The Cardine Way,'" he echoed—"Oh, the Cardines are one of the oldest English families. They've given us scores of great administrators, but they've always had the name for being a bit uncompromising—dogged, you know. Whatever they say or do is right, in their own eyes. That's where the expression comes from."

"Have a cocktail in their honour, Walter? I like that damned stiff spirit of your English aristocrats. Gerald Raithe always reminds one of it." The American was one of those who had thrown in his lot with the British element—"And is what the Cardines say always right?"

Albert Darkin had seen through the manœuvre to stop the incipient quarrel between Daddy Mallowe and himself. He had plenty of courage of an unpleasant kind—the courage of his convictions, he called it; he had not forgotten Gerald Raithe's threat of the day before; and he was determined not to be silenced by Blackwood and Halton.

"Are the Cardines right?" he echoed scornfully. "Mr. Halton, ask the people of England

how they've voted on that question. Hubert Cardine, the Viceroy, who tried to prevent the spread of education in India; John Cardine, who seized half a million square miles in Africa; Raymond Cardine, the Ambassador, who wanted to land us in war with the free people of Germany, in order to help Roman Catholic France—did the British Elector support these when they tried the Cardine Way dodge? Then this Charles Cardine," Mr. Darkin despised all titles. "When he resigned, and the Government fell, the people put the Right Side in power."

Every one in the smoking-room was listening. One or two men had risen to their feet, in order to see better, whilst Captain Simpson was now standing close behind Walter Blackwood.

The latter turned to the sailor. "Don't be offended, captain. He's just a political fanatic. I am sure that every other member will regret the incident. We try to make our honorary members feel at home amongst us."

"Lucky thing Raithe isn't here," more than one man muttered to his neighbour. All of them had heard of what had happened on the quay, and, in some subtle way, Gerald had become recognised as the champion of the Cardines. "Rotten bad form! Why's the little brute showing off. . . . That Hyde Park muck."

"But, Mr. Darkin, you have not yet told us how this Sir Charles chose to go the Cardine Way." It was Carl Gunther who spoke. He had just

come in from the veranda, and was standing in the doorway, an enormous cigar between his fingers, an enormous topee on his shaven head.

"Shame! The Chairman!" The atmosphere was electric; but it was the youngest member, Massie, old Daddy Mallowe's clerk, who drew the first discharge.

"Shame!"—half a dozen men echoed the word; but Carl Gunther continued to smile blandly, and Darkin smiled back at him.

"Tell your countrymen, Mr. Darkin. Some of them it seems do not know," the thick Teutonic voice was gross and aggressive, charged with half-drunken insult.

Young Massie picked up a heavy stone match-stand, and poised it in his hand; but there were tears of rage in his eyes which seemed likely to spoil his aim.

"Don't be an ass. We'll kill him, kill all of them, later"—it was Jack Bartram who had seized Massie's wrist. "Gerald Raithe is going to show us how to kill them," really, he had not the least idea of what he was saying.

Every man in the smoking-room was on his feet now; there was not one who did not realise that, in some weird, almost inexplicable way, a crisis had arisen, that this matter was a test of strength between the British and the Germans of Katu.

Walter Blackwood was a small man, but he placed himself almost aggressively in front of

Captain Simpson. "You're only an honorary member. Leave it to us," he growled.

"Oh, about Charles Cardine, Gunther"; Albert Darkin glanced round the room, meeting the eyes of his fellow-countrymen with a bitter sneer. The one man he really feared was not there. "That's the Cardine Way in another form —more domestic. Lady Cardine——"

A moment later, and there would have been a killing of unnecessary people, and possibly much trouble would have been saved thereby; but a commotion at the doorway made Albert Darkin pause, then young Locock, the secretary of the Club, huge, ungainly, with a crop of tousled hair, was saying with an infinite gravity, which somehow did not seem incongruous, "Gentlemen, you will regret to hear that one of the greatest of our fellow-countrymen, Sir Charles Cardine, died ten minutes ago. The news has just come from the yacht. The Club will be closed immediately as a mark of respect."

Joseph Simpson bowed his head on the bar, and sobbed like a child.

As they walked away together, Massie turned suddenly to Jack Bartram.

"How he ignored those Squareheads—Locock, I mean. He never asked the Chairman —that German hog—or any of the committee. But it was touch and go whether the Squareheads agreed. There were six of us and Halton and the Virginian, Cary; but on the other side there

were seven Germans, the three Dutchmen, and that worm Darkin . . . you're a new hand in Katu, but perhaps you've seen already that we're fed up with the Kaiserlicks."

Bartram gave a queer little laugh. "I've gathered as much from Gerald Raithe."

"It wouldn't have happened if Jerry had been there"—Massie's eyes flashed—"They're afraid of Jerry—Gunther and that lot. . . . What is there about the man, Bartram?" He stopped abruptly, and now there were tears in his eyes. "I would—I would go to hell if Jerry told me to—but if it's the other way round, Lord! how fellows hate him."

"I understand." Bartram laid a hand on his arm. "But don't do anything to bring about a crisis—yet. Remember, if there had been a scrap to-day, though Germany would have stuck by her people, our rulers would probably have offered us up as sacrifices to the fetish they call Peace."

The boy nodded, then he cursed picturesquely. "Makes you wish you had been born a hundred years ago, instead of in these rotten times. There was some hope for a fellow. It was worth while marrying and having children . . . something for them to look forward to, but now!" He shrugged his shoulders, then, "Jerry will be mad," he went on. "He had warned Darkin to leave Lady Cardine's name alone . . . Bartram, Jerry'll kill some one one of these days,

some blighter like Darkin. He doesn't understand that we've got to put up with them. You're a good pal of his—watch him, won't you ? " His voice was trembling curiously. To him, it seemed almost like blasphemy to suggest that the man he worshipped could do anything unwise or wrong.

Jack Bartram remembered that stone match-stand poised in the speaker's hand but half an hour previously, and he suppressed a smile with difficulty.

" I think that Gerald knows what he's about," he answered. " Still, I'll do my best."

## CHAPTER IX

### SIR CHARLES CARDINE'S SUCCESSOR

WALTER BLACKWOOD closed his note-book slowly, put it back in his pocket, then turned to Gerald Raithe.

"Well, that's the lot, Jerry, I think," he said. "We've got through it quicker than I expected. I'll draw up the necessary documents, then you can have a draft on Singapore. . . . Come across to the Club, and have a bottle of fizz on the deal."

Gerald nodded. He was in a strangely silent mood that morning. Practically speaking, he had allowed Blackwood to have his own way so far as the valuation of the business assets was concerned, not arguing a single point, with the result that, though the buyer was unusually honourable for a business man, he had contrived to make an extremely good bargain.

As they walked across the Square to the Club, Gerald glanced upwards at the flagstaffs. Then a red flush came over his face. The flag on the Club was at half-mast, but on the Palace, on the fort, and worst of all, on the British Consulate,

the bunting was flaunting out at the mast-head. It was a deliberate insult to the memory of the statesman who had died but twelve hours previously.

Blackwood saw the look in his companion's eyes. To use his own expression, he "hated shindies," and he had a strong suspicion that Gerald Raithe would not quit the island without having more than one "shindy"—that is, unless he were restrained.

"That's just a mistake, those flags, Jerry," he hastened to say. "I'll see Gunther about it. Don't leave a lot of enemies behind you."

Gerald laughed bitterly. "I shall do that in any case. But don't worry, Blackwood. People like these could never insult Sir Charles Cardine, dead or living. I'm glad I wasn't in the Club last night—oh, I heard all about it—because I might have lost my temper, and things of that kind improve by keeping."

"What the deuce do you mean?" the older man gave him a keen glance. "We're in Mati for business, not for the good of our health, and we've all got a lot to forget and forgive."

The other drew himself up stiffly. "I am the judge of what I ought to forgive, Blackwood," he answered, in a tone which rendered further discussion of the matter an impertinence.

They entered the Club in silence, but, a moment later, Gerald began to talk, easily and naturally, of the prospect of the trading season, giving his

successor in the business a number of valuable hints.

"It doesn't matter to me. I shall never touch it again, but I would like to see you and Wrench do well, for your sake, and for Patsy's. I wish it had been possible to settle some of it on her."

Blackwood raised his glass, and watched the bubbles rising through the wine. "You could have done so, Jerry, in one way. Alice hoped, I hoped, it was going to be that. . . . You don't mind my speaking plainly?"

"I know," Gerald was staring through the French window, across the harbour, staring, quite unconsciously, at the "White Lady." "I should hate you and Alice, and the other decent people here, to think badly of me. Patsy was my chum, as a kiddie—you know that—and I couldn't break it, could I? But I can't marry, Blackwood. I daren't marry. It would be an absolute crime as things stand with me. You might tell Alice that. Patsy's too young to care yet."

Walter Blackwood put his glass down, empty. It never entered into his head to doubt the other man's sincerity. "I'm very, very sorry," he answered. "Is it—is it something that can't be cured?"

"I think so." Gerald's voice was perfectly steady. "There's a chance, I'm told, a fighting chance. But it's not worth considering . . . Patsy knows I'm going . . . Shall we have

another bottle? No? . . . You're sure? . . . Well, I must go off to the yacht."

The other man shrugged his shoulders. "We sent our cards, and the skipper sent back word that Lady Cardine was too ill to be troubled with anything. Not a very polite way of putting it. I'm sorry. I wish Alice could have gone to her, but she can't after that. I should send a card and no more, if I were you. Captain Simpson cut up a little rough last night."

Gerald's eyes blazed suddenly. "Wasn't there enough cause? Bartram told me. . . . It was a deliberate, studied insult. You're on the committee. Why the devil haven't you called a special meeting to expel Darkin and Gunther, too? I am going to apologize to Simpson as a member of the Club, but the Club must apologize as a whole."

One of those "shindies" which Blackwood had feared seemed uncomfortably close, but he tried his best to avoid it.

"Be reasonable, Jerry," he urged. "In a little community like this, we have to give and take. I may not like Darkin and Gunther—I detest them, as a matter of fact—but I've got to meet every day and do business with them. After all, Sir Charles is dead, and it doesn't hurt him in the least. Besides, how can we expel the chairman, especially when he holds the liquor monopoly? He'd refuse to serve any of us."

Gerald laughed bitterly. Walter Blackwood

was a Public School man, and had started straight, but he had been trained in the City, and the two traditions were always at war within him. "You're right, I suppose, because you've got to stay here. . . . And you've got to think of Alice. But didn't it ever strike you that this island ought to be British, that it's a damned disgrace to us to allow Gunther to control it?"

For answer, the shipping agent shrugged his shoulders. "That's one of Patsy's notions. She's converted Alice too. But it's rot. What does Patsy understand about it all? And, candidly, I reckon you're to blame as well. You've encouraged the child. You ought to have told her to leave it alone," there was a touch of irritation in his voice. "The youngsters, Lo-cock and those, listen to her, and it's bad for business. Gunther is cutting up rough already. . . . We've got to live and let live. There's no patriotism in business. . . . If anyone gets Katu, it will be Germany—in fact, I think she's got the option as it is. By the time she takes it, though, I hope to have made my pile and got clear."

He was a patriotic man, according to his lights. Had he been a stockbroker, he would have waved a little Union Jack as vigorously as any one on the news of a British victory which sent the market up; but not being affected directly by the price of shares, he had always done according to the traditions of his kind—kept his political

opinions for use out of business hours. Gerald's views had worried and annoyed him, more than once. They reminded him too much of what he had been taught at school, of the things which he had had to unlearn in the City. . . .

Captain Simpson was waiting at the top of the gangway when Gerald stepped aboard the "White Lady."

"Her ladyship will see you in the boudoir, sir," he said. There was a formal note of respect in his voice which made Gerald raise his eyebrows slightly. Before, they had met as equals, but now there was some subtle difference. Gerald might have been the owner.

Margaret came into the boudoir almost immediately. She was dressed, as usual, in white—the conventional signs of mourning were nothing to her—but her drawn face and the heavy marks under her eyes were far more eloquent than any crêpe could have been.

She held out her hand, and, almost unconsciously it seemed, the man bent down and touched it with his lips.

"I thought you would want some help, and —and it is my place to come to you," he said.

Lady Cardine smiled faintly. "I expected you—Sir Gerald."

"So you know already?" he did not seem surprised.

She sank into a big chair. "He—Sir Charles —told me last evening. He was conscious for a

few minutes, just at the end. He had known you, all along, from the moment he heard your voice."

Gerald nodded. "I saw yesterday that he knew, when he spoke about my parents. I wish now there had been time to tell him more. You see, my governor was always so bitter, that I had a wrong impression. I would have given a great deal not to have been too late."

"You weren't too late," her voice was very low. "It made all the difference to him. He was proud of you—as the next Cardine. I am so grateful to you for having made him happy. The name was everything to him."

The man did not answer at once. He knew, perfectly well, that the dead statesman's wife had been even more to him than the family name, but he did not attempt to tell her so. Her husband had been little short of a demi-god to her, and it was best and kindest at the moment to leave things as they were. Instead, he went on to speak of the funeral. As the head of the family it was for him to make the arrangements on her behalf.

Margaret faced the question quietly. "I have asked the doctor, and he says it is impossible to wait. It must be done quickly."

Gerald nodded. He had expected that. "Shall it be at sea then? Not on shore here, Lady Cardine. It is native territory now, and it may never be British. The sea is ours, still—the right grave for one of the greatest Englishmen.

I think it should be off Sudang Heads, outside the great harbour of which I told him, the place we want to—to seize. It would seem as if his spirit were guarding it," he spoke huskily, almost shyly, as is the way of the Englishman when he says anything of that kind.

She thanked him with her eyes, and he knew she was at one with him on that point, then, " Will you see Captain Simpson ? He knows who you are."

" Yes, I will arrange it for this evening." He seemed, somehow, to have grown far older and graver during the past few hours. " One thing only, Lady Cardine, I want to remain Gerald Raithe for the present—at least until I am through with this affair in Katu . . . I think you understand. After the scandal," he flushed suddenly, " I did not want to be known as Colonel Cardine's son, the stepson of that woman, and now, in this affair, my own name would prejudice the Powers-that-Be against me. I think Sir Charles realised that."

Margaret had risen too. " I understand, and I am so glad, more than glad, that you are going on with your scheme. He wished it, so much ; and I could see how proud of you he was. As a Cardine, I am proud, too . . . And now, I leave everything to you, absolutely."

Captain Simpson was evidently expecting his visitor when Gerald knocked at the door of his cabin.

"I tumbled to who you must be yesterday, Sir Gerald," he said. "It was when I saw the 'Zeta'—your father's old yacht. Already, you had reminded me a lot of the Colonel, as well as of Sir Charles. I'm very glad it is you. It must have eased the old gentleman's mind. He had been worrying a lot about you, not knowing what you were like. He honoured me with a good deal of his confidence, Sir Gerald. Since his marriage, there were very few people he would meet. The 'White Lady' was his home, though he always hoped to die in Cardine Place."

Gerald nodded, absently. Cardine Place, the great house he had never seen, was his now, so were the family estates; but that did not make him a rich man. The net income was practically nil, and there would be the death duties to pay. Sir Charles' immense wealth had come to him through his mother, and would not follow the title. He had said, perfectly plainly, that it would go to Margaret, and Gerald was well content that this should be so. She deserved every good thing that life could bring her.

He cared little about his new dignity. It was good to be the head of the Cardine family, to have the Cardine honour in his keeping, good to think that he was the successor of so many splendid Englishmen; but the baronetcy, though one of the oldest in England, was nothing.

Tradesmen and London County Councillors were made baronets. Little Englanders, who

loathed the very idea of a standing army, were made members of the essentially military order of knighthood, and used the fact to secure higher fees as directors of fraudulent companies.

He was Cardine of Cardine Place ; but, for the time being, it suited him better to be Gerald Raithe. His brain, not his name, was going to carry him through his great adventure.

" I'm going to ask a favour of you, Captain Simpson," he said. " I want to remain Gerald Raithe—for the present. After the funeral you can just put me ashore in the pinnace, and none of your fellows will have a chance to talk. . . . I understand that my cousin wishes to go straight back to England."

The skipper tugged at his long red moustache. " Aren't you going home, Mr. Raithe ? It's a big thing to inherit ; and Katu's a God-forgotten hole, if ever there was one."

Gerald smiled. " I inherit the title, little else. Lady Cardine will be one of the richest women in England."

" And one of the saddest," the skipper added an oath, merely to cover his emotion. " The Almighty alone knows how good she was to him—one of God's angels, Sir Gerald," he drew his hand across his eyes, quite openly. " Now, I suppose some of those hounds who threw mud at her will be after her money."

The new baronet started. Somehow, he had not thought of the possibility of Margaret marry-

ing again, yet, why not? She was only about thirty-two, very beautiful, enormously rich, perhaps, he, himself, as the head of the family, would have to give her away at the altar!

It is strange how the thought of comparatively small side issues occasionally seems almost to overshadow the main question. He could see the gaping crowds, half sentimental, half sensual, could smell the sickly white flowers, could hear the priest—it might be a Bishop even—snuffling through the Service, missing all that is beautiful in it, and emphasising its materialism; then, Margaret would have gone out of his life for ever.

"We'll have tiffin up here, Mr. Raithe," the skipper's voice recalled him to the present. "At sundown, we will be off Sudang Heads. I will give orders at once."

There was some little surprise amongst the ship's company when they saw the tall stranger standing beside Lady Cardine, whilst Captain Simpson read the Burial Service, but none of them, save the doctor, knew the reason for that stranger's presence.

Half an hour later, Margaret sent for Gerald. She knew that the steam pinnace was being hoisted out, and that the moment of parting was near.

She had broken down completely as the waters had closed over her husband's body, but now she was dry-eyed again.

"Gerald," she coloured vividly. "Gerald—I suppose I may call you that, as we are cousins, at least by marriage, and your name is mine—I want to thank you for my sake, and, even more, for his. It made such a difference to him at the end. I hope—I hope—" suddenly she was at a loss for words.

He understood, instantly, "I shall be Home not very long after you—Margaret. This is not, 'Good-bye,' only 'Au-revoir.' If there is anything I can ever do—you did so much for him—" then he, too, seemed unable to continue.

In silence, Margaret Cardine held out her hand. Once more he kissed it, as a man might kiss the hand of his Queen; then he turned towards the door.

"Gerald!" she had found words now. "Gerald, remember your promise about that hideous drug. You are going to conquer it. He helped me to fight it. You won't forget."

His eyes were glistening, and it was a matter of sheer impossibility for him to speak, but he renewed the promise with his eyes.

Darkness had already fallen when the yacht's steam pinnace put Gerald ashore at Mati. He knew it was perfectly useless to try and avoid observation, that, practically speaking, every one in Mati knew where he had been; consequently, he strolled straight into the Club, and ordered a whisky and soda.

"Yes, I went out to the funeral. They buried

him off Sudang Heads," he said, in reply to a question from Daddy Mallowe.

Albert Darkin, who was standing at the bar with Carl Gunther, raised his eyebrows.

"I wonder that, considering the position Sir Charles Cardine formerly held, Lady Cardine did not ask the British Consul to attend, as well as a representative of His Highness, the Raja," he murmured.

Carl Gunther laughed rudely—he had not forgotten the quiet scorn with which Margaret Cardine had treated him. "I am afraid I should have had to send my clerk in that case," he grunted. "I have other things to do, besides helping to bury English tourists."

The clerk was a half-caste, and there was not a man in the smoking-room who was not aware of the fact.

Every eye was turned on Gerald Raithe. The bitterness between him and Gunther was a thing of long-standing, but never before had the German dared to insult him openly, nay, more, to insult every Briton in the place.

Gerald had gone very white, and, for a moment, it looked as though he were about to pit his wiry, nervous strength against the gross bulk of the Teuton; but in the end, he turned once more to Daddy Mallowe, and began to talk about the pepper crop.

Gunther laughed again, and expectorated noisily on the floor. "Darkin, my friend," he

said, " It's a good thing you didn't take my bet about your fellow-countrymen. Our friend, Mr. Lecher, was right about the courage of the modern ' English gentleman.' "

He drank off his cocktail, then swaggered towards the door, followed by Albert Darkin ; but Gerald moved more swiftly, and was in the doorway first.

Gunther made as though to push by him, then stopped.

" Let me pass," he growled, though some of his assurance seemed suddenly to have left him.

" Carl Gunther," Gerald raised his voice so that that all in the room might hear, " The man you sent to my room the other night made a mess of things, and I have got his kris. When your turn comes, I shall not employ some one else ; I shall do it myself, openly, in the daylight. Do you understand, you gross brute ? "

## CHAPTER X

### A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOUR

THE Under-Secretary drew himself up primly. He objected strongly to people who would not take "No" as an answer, and more strongly still to those who came to him with unconventional propositions. Although he had only been in office four years, he had the perfect bureaucrat's manner, as questioners in the House of Commons knew well. Himself a scion of a great Whig house, at heart he was by no means satisfied with all his ministerial colleagues—one of them preached at Pleasant Sunday Afternoons, and several of them dealt unkindly with the King's English—but only through association with them could he have reached office. For all his primness, he felt sometimes that he had lost caste to a certain extent, and it was most annoying to have a man like Sir Gerald Cardine, a great aristocrat by birth, driving home that fact.

"The answer is final," he said. "And the Prime Minister wished me to tell you, further, that the matter must be left alone. The German Government feels very strongly about it." He

had tried to meet his visitor's gaze, but now his eyes fell on the blotting-pad, and he began to draw vague triangles.

Gerald, who looked very tall and very thin in an iron-grey morning suit, made an impatient gesture,

"The German Government!" he retorted. "So we are to give up the chance of acquiring one of the finest ports in the East for fear of offending the Germans? They have no prior claim. It is a matter of enormous importance, gigantic importance to us. If another Power annexes Katu, half the value of Singapore and Hong-Kong, our two most valuable possessions, will be gone. We shall no longer have absolute control of the greatest trade route in the world."

The Under-Secretary drew a circle round the largest of his triangles, drew it rather badly, then announced, still without looking up, "I have given you the official decision," he said. "I have nothing more to add—officially. But, Cardine," they had been at school together, "I will advise you, privately, to leave it severely alone. It's no use. Darkin won't have it, and Lecher, the Labour man, is equally opposed to it. Some of us" for a moment he faced the other, "some of us may think as you do, but the rest carry too much weight in the House. And your very name would be like a red rag to a bull to them."

Gerald flushed haughtily. He was Cardine

of Cardine Place now, and he never forgot the fact, never forgot what the Cardines had done in the past. To be condemned by the men of the new type, the latter-day politicians, the successful grocers, the street preachers, the loud-voiced gas-workers, condemned because he was a Cardine! He turned on the Under-Secretary.

"Thanks, Soane, for your advice," he said. "It is hardly what your father, or your grandfather, would have given. I, myself, prefer to stick to the family traditions."

He was a very angry man as he walked up Whitehall, but it cannot be said that he was a disappointed one. All along, he had felt that old Sir Charles had been right in declaring that the British Government would not interfere in the matter of Katu.

It had not been his only disappointment. Everything had seemed to go wrong since he left the Far East. The journey Home had been unutterably dull—nowhere had he managed to get any word of the "White Lady"—and on arrival, the family solicitor had been able to give him only bad news.

"I am afraid your inheritance will not make you a richer man, Sir Gerald," old John Porter had said. "Sir Charles kept things up splendidly, but that was not out of the entailed estates. Now, there is not enough, nothing like enough, for you to take up your position at Cardine

Place, especially after the death duties have been paid. I should advise you to let it, at least for the present. I have a tenant in view, who is ready to pay a handsome rent."

Gerald had shrugged his shoulders. It was no surprise to him.

" Who is your tenant ? " he had asked.

The lawyer had shaken his head. " For the moment, I am not allowed to say, but the offer is a generous, a most generous one. If you allow me to accept it, I shall be able to put matters on a sound basis. Otherwise——" and he had paused significantly.

" Otherwise there will be a smash ? " Gerald had supplied the missing word.

John Porter had nodded. " Exactly. I am glad you understand the position. I am glad, too, to be able to settle the Cardine Place question. Your step-mother——" Once more he paused, this time awkwardly.

His client's face grew black. The very name of his father's second wife was hateful to him. It was through her that he had left England and become Gerald Raithe. The world might have forgotten the Tankery-Cardine scandal, and it had certainly called him a fool for taking it to heart as he had done ; but to him it was still a living thing. He could still remember his father's cynical face as he sat in court listening to the evidence, still see the thin, beautifully-shaped hand stroking the white moustache, as

though to hide a smile at the judge's scathing rebukes, still recall every word of the quarrel with his father afterwards, when the very last shred of respect which he might have had left for his parent had been torn away. He had never seen him since, had never wanted to see him, had done everything possible to prevent being identified with him in any way; but there had been one more interview, when the woman had swept into his rooms, and had talked after the manner of her kind. Ten years had elapsed since then, but the very mention of her was still enough to make his eyes flash. Also, it recalled to him vividly the figure of the other woman who bore the name of Cardine.

"What about my father's wife?" he had asked, curtly.

The old solicitor had tried to put it gently. "She—well—she thought you ought to let her live at Cardine Place."

"Never." Gerald had sprung to his feet. That creature at the house which had once been Margaret's home! "When you see her, tell her I will have nothing to do with her, nothing at all."

The other had smiled. "I will write, I think. She was a little tempestuous. You see, she assumed you were dead, and already called your half-brother 'Sir Herbert.' In fact, so little does she seem to know about these matters that she sent in her name to me as 'Lady Cardine.'

She has not been, I am afraid, leading an altogether blameless life."

Gerald had clenched his hands. That she should have dared to take Margaret's name! It was utterly abominable. Yet what could he do? The mere fact of his protesting would make her more determined to persist, and he had no control of any kind over her financial affairs.

It had been on his lips to ask after the real Lady Cardine; but, somehow, though he longed for news, this had checked it. He could not mention her name after the other.

Altogether, he had left the solicitor's office in an angry and despondent mood. He had not expected much financial advantage from his inheritance, but it had been a shock to find that, unless he could let Cardine Place, he would actually be out of pocket for the time being.

But his negotiations with the Government had been even more unsatisfactory. From the outset, he had seen that old Sir Charles had been right, that in the case of a large number of prominent men on the ministerial side there was an actual hatred of anything in the nature of the spirit which had animated the great Empire builders—Chatham, Hastings, John Mackenzie and their kind. It was quite useless to speak to them of the control of trade routes. To them, a tramway line run by the local Council, with secret commissions on all contracts for the

Tramway Committee, was a far more important matter.

Most men had never heard of Katu, and, consequently, were prone to argue that it could be of no importance at all. Anyway, we wanted no more colonies, and Germany did want them. Germans, after all, were men and brothers—did they not prove that by copying us in building a huge fleet?—and we ought not to interfere with their expansion. Moreover, those who argued in this way were perfectly sincere, perfectly obtuse, and Gerald was quick to see the futility of trying to convert them. Only a rise in the cost of living, due to our loss of the control of the trade routes, would do that.

As for the Labour members, he recalled Sir Charles' words and wasted no time on them. Also, he had had opportunities of studying Mr. Lecher, who was now their chairman. True, he had been abroad at the time of that general railway strike, which had coincided so strangely, or so obviously, with Germany's bellicose demonstrations, but the lesson had not been lost on him—no Cardine had ever been a fool when high politics were concerned—and he grasped the hopelessness of an appeal for support in that quarter. It would be going to the enemy's camp.

The decision of the Cabinet, conveyed to him by the Under-Secretary, was final. He realised that. There remained now only one course open to him in England—to rouse the nation itself,

through the medium of the Opposition Press. He had refrained from doing anything in that way until the Government had given its answer, but now he was free.

Gloag, the editor of the *Daily Comet*, was the man to do it. He had met him once, on board ship, and in any case the visiting card of Cardine of Cardine Place would ensure him an interview anywhere.

Yes, he would go down to Gloag, at once, and tell him the whole story. But first there was something else he must do. Chills were running through him, and, despite all his efforts to prevent it, his hand would go to his lips, fingering them nervously.

He glanced at the clock in a shop window, then swore under his breath.

"It's only three hours since I took a pill. My God! The sands are running out for me pretty rapidly. At this rate, it will be three or four months—no more. . . . My lady, I am not keeping my promise. Still, you understand!"

Then he turned into a bar, ordered a brandy and soda, and took two of those fatal little white pills.

## CHAPTER XI

### A LONE HAND

THE Gerald Cardine who sent up his card to the editor of the *Comet* was very different from the man who had ordered the brandy and soda half an hour previously. Then, he had been limp, dull-eyed, almost nervous; now he was keen, erect, masterful.

The porter, seeing the name, hastened to show him into the special waiting-room, hurried a boy upstairs with the card, and bowed obsequiously when, five minutes later, word came down that Mr. Gloag would see Sir Gerald Cardine at once.

There was nothing essentially editorial about John Gloag's office—in fact, it might have proved almost disappointing to many who have read in fiction of editorial sanctums. A pleasant room, well above the worst of the roar of the traffic, a big table with a moderate number of papers and photographs on it, a smaller table for a secretary, a telephone instrument, and several comfortable, leather-covered chairs—those were all.

John Gloag himself, immense, stooping, with strong glasses and a big cigar, rose to meet his visitor.

"Glad to meet you, Sir Gerald," he began formally, then his manner changed. "By Jove, you're the fellow who was on the old 'Lady Melbourne' with me, seven or eight years ago. I've a good memory for faces. Sit down, and have a cigar." He was far too tactful a man, and also remembered far too much about the Tankery-Cardine scandal, to make any reference to the fact that he had known the other as Gerald Raithe. It was easy to understand the change of name; impossible to imagine that anyone would, willingly, be known as Colonel Cardine's son, at least until the story had died down. Gerald went straight to the point. He had all the facts concerning Katu arranged in his brain, and he could tell the story in what seemed to him to be an absolutely convincing manner. Like most men who have obsessions, he could not understand how any sane person could fail to be on his side.

But, at the end of it, John Gloag got up and began to pace the room, chewing fiercely at the end of an unlighted cigar.

"I believe every word you say, Sir Gerald," he said at last, "every word. In fact, we have already been told of certain Englishmen being employed on the other side over this matter. But I can't help you in the very least degree, and, personally, I think that, in worrying yourself

about the affair, you are merely wasting your time."

The angry flush returned to Gerald's face. "Why can't you help?" he demanded. "You profess to uphold the Imperial idea."

John Gloag shrugged his shoulders. "Personally, I am with you, heart and soul. But I have to give the public what it wants, not what it ought to have. Just now, cricket and golf swamp everything else in interest. The Empire is rather a stale subject, and, in any case, we, and the party generally, are committed to the idea of big red splashes on the map—Britains Overseas, and all that kind of unutterable rubbish. We know—you and I know—that Hong-Kong and Singapore are worth more to us than all the self-governing colonies put together; but if the *Comet* tried to tell the public that, we should be looked on as mad. . . . No, I am very, very sorry to have to say it, but, huge though our circulation is, we could not raise a shadow of interest over the question of Katu."

"Gladstone did it over the Straits of Malacca, did a similar thing," Gerald retorted.

The editor smiled. "I am not Gladstone, and, moreover, Gladstone could not have done it to-day. Everything has changed. This is the age of Council Schools and Parish Pumps. We have infinitely greater means of obtaining news from abroad, yet we are infinitely more insular, or, rather, more petty-minded. . . . It's

no use. I won't touch the matter. And, you know," he hesitated for a moment, then went on, " you know that your own name, mentioned in connection with the matter, would suffice to stir up opposition. I like the Cardine Way myself, but we're ruled to-day by the Board School teacher and the Labour man, and they don't understand the code of your family."

Sir Gerald Cardine stared out of the window. He was vaguely aware that there were pigeons on the roof opposite, descendants probably of pigeons who had been there in the days of Chatham, and he wondered if they, too, had deteriorated. It was absurd, of course, the whole thing was absurd. He, himself, was absurd, out of touch with the modern spirit. The roar of the traffic in Fleet Street came faintly to his ears, and, cutting shrilly through it, the voices of newsboys shouting " lunch time scores " in cricket matches.

Nothing else mattered, save the " Bread and Circuses " of to-day.

Yet he was going on with his absurdity. Had he not promised Margaret Cardine, and, doomed as he was, in the grip of that loathsome drug, was it not the obvious thing to do, to make a last fight, and to go under fighting ?

" Very well, then," his voice was low and quiet. " Very well. As no one else will do it, I shall do it myself. I don't suppose the nation will refuse the gift of the island." The editor of the *Comet* stared at him for the space of ten seconds or

more, then, impulsively, thrust out a huge hand.

"You are a damned fool," he said, huskily. "You must be, or you would bow to the inevitable. . . . You mean to try the Raja Brooke game? It won't do—these are the days of wireless. But it's worth while, by God, it's worth while . . . I wish I were free, to go with you."

Gerald gripped his hand, then looked away. These were almost the same words Sir Charles Cardine had used. It was a great thing, a splendid thing, to know that men whose good opinion was worth having agreed with him. And Margaret Cardine had approved too.

"Yes, the Raja Brooke game, if you like to put it that way," he answered slowly. "It's a toss-up—I am far from being a rich man—but I have worked pretty hard at the scheme, and some of the hill-men are with me. We've got it all planned out. We went into it thoroughly."

The editor gave him a keen look. "We?" he echoed the word. "Who else is in it?"

Once more Gerald flushed. In Mati it had seemed natural enough to have Patsy Wrench as his lieutenant and adviser, but here, with the noise of Fleet Street floating up to his ears, matters appeared very different. Moreover, he realised suddenly, with a sense of something very nearly akin to shame, that he had given very little thought to Patsy since leaving Katu.

" Oh, I've talked it over, with people I could trust," he answered—and the sense of shame seemed to grow on him, for Patsy, and Patsy alone, knew any details, and, beyond her, there was only Margaret Cardine who knew of the plan itself, though Bartram had been given a hint. " I think it can be done, if I land the arms . . . Ismail is a rotter of the first class ; and I am popular amongst the hill-men."

John Gloag shook his head. " It's a mad scheme. The Government would disown you at once."

" It's nothing to do with them," Gerald retorted. " I am going to make myself Raja of the independent state of Katu. If I ask for a protectorate afterwards, that will be different."

The editor flung his cigar end into the grate, rather viciously, " You're going to get killed, Cardine ; you're going to lose your life for nothing —and we can't afford men like you being chucked away. Your kind is scarce. . . . What money have you ? " the question came sharply, almost brutally, yet there was no hint of impertinence in it.

Sir Gerald Cardine was not an easy man to cross-examine, but, on this occasion, he understood the intention of his cross-examiner. " I have my schooner, the ' Zeta,' which I'm going to arm with a couple of guns—she is auxiliary screw—and I've got, or can put my hand on, about ten thousand pounds beyond."

"You're going to sink everything in it—the very last cent.?" Gloag had sat down again now, and was speaking quietly.

The younger man nodded. "If I could sell Cardine Place, and the Cardine estates, for that purpose, I would do so. I can't, of course, because of the entail, but the wish is there. Practically speaking, I am a dying man—at any rate, I'm a doomed man—and I want to do something before the end comes."

"I see." Gloag was watching him keenly from under his heavy eyebrows, trying to diagnose his complaint. Perhaps he succeeded. At any rate, he asked no more questions on that point, but went on to try and extract details of his scheme for dispossessing the Raja of Katu.

Gerald talked freely now—he knew when he could trust a man—but as he finished, the editor of the *Comet* shook his head.

"I see disaster," he said. "You need ten times that amount of money. These chiefs, the hill-men, how can you really trust them? When you have given them rifles and ammunition, they will probably turn on you at once. You must be able to bribe them to remain true to you. And as for white men, you can only have a couple or so. The idea is great, splendid; but it won't work out on that amount of capital. Everything, nowadays, comes down to a question of money. I suppose there's no one to whom you can go?"

The younger man shook his head. "I know

no one, and the commercial possibilities of Katu are not enough to tempt speculators. Moreover, actual business would remain the same then, whether we had the island or the Germans had it."

"Did you get none of Sir Charles Cardine's money then?" the editor demanded. "No? It all went to Lady Cardine, I suppose. Do you know her at all?"

Gerald nodded. "I've met her once or twice."

"Humph!" Gloag glanced at the clock. He was immensely interested, but there were scores of other matters clamouring for his attention, and, as yet, this was not a newspaper story. "I like her. We're great friends, in fact; still I wish he had left you some of it. Perhaps, now she's so rich, the old slanders will die down. I imagine you've no thought of challenging the will, as the next of kin. That way, you might get all the money you want."

If he said the words to test his visitor, he certainly succeeded. There was no mistaking the sincerity of Gerald's wrath.

"D'you think I'd rob the sweetest and best woman on God's earth?" he began. "The only woman—" he broke off abruptly, and took another line. "What the blazes do you mean? How could the will be upset?"

The journalist cut a fresh cigar very carefully. "You were abroad at the time of the marriage. There were stories, many of them, that started

either in the Lobby itself, or in one of the big political clubs. She was married already, some of them said. Others merely declared that she had been—well, indiscreet. The name of one of Sir Charles' most bitter opponents was mentioned, a man who is probably your opponent now. They all came from that side."

Gerald got up and was pacing the room angrily. It was not altogether news to him ; but it came home as it had never done before. He knew now what Margaret Cardine represented in his life—his ideal. True, the morphia rendered that ideal unattainable—always, at the back of his mind was the knowledge that he was a doomed man—but, none the less, she was absolutely sacred in his eyes.

"Who was the man they mentioned?" he asked hoarsely.

John Gloag did not hesitate. He was a keen student of humanity, and he could see that, for some reason or other, this fierce-eyed, prematurely grey young aristocrat was a reckless, almost a desperate, man ; and he could see, too, that if he would throw his life away for Katu, he would be even more ready to do so for the sake of Margaret Cardine. To tell him more would be, perhaps, to provoke murder. In many ways, Gerald was a reversion to the type of those ancestors of his who, holding a then impregnable castle, were a law unto themselves, until Edward the Fourth managed to bribe the garrison to surrender, and

so was able to hang most of the male Cardines. Gloag did not know that story, but he recognised the possibility of something of the kind He had met several other men who seemed to belong partly to the middle ages, partly to the twentieth century.

" It's no good repeating names," he said, rather curtly. " If you don't bring the subject up, no one else will. Still, I am glad to have your assurance about it. And now, Sir Gerald," he glanced at the clock, " it is time for the daily conference. I am sorry I can do so little for you. But I can propose this to the firm—that, if you do decide to make a raid on Katu, we send one of our special men with you, so that we get the exclusive story. In return, I think the proprietors would make—secretly, of course—a substantial addition to your funds."

Gerald held out his hand. " Thanks," he said briefly, " Let me know as early as possible. I shall try no more for outside help. Except for you, it will be a ' lone hand played lone.' "

" ' Down to Gehenna or up to the Throne,' " the journalist quoted as the door closed behind the other. " It'll be Gehenna this time, I think," then he sighed, " What a damned waste of a fine man ! "

## CHAPTER XII

### COLONEL CARDINE'S WIDOW

THE lady fanned herself languidly, keeping off the acrid smoke of the Turkish cigarette, while that same cigarette, smouldering on the table, was destroying a fine, drawn-thread tablecloth.

John Weste, watching out of half-closed eyes, decided that the whole thing was typical of her —innate vulgarity, coupled with futile waste. He decided, too, that, if ever he could summon up the energy to write a novel, Ettie Cardine, widow of Colonel Cardine, and stepmother of the new baronet, should figure in it.

"So my stepson is really going to make an utter fool of himself? I cannot say that I feel any deep regrets, especially as there is a chance of his rather useless career coming to a sudden end in that island." Mrs. Cardine helped herself to a fresh cigarette, and nodded to the little man in the big chair beside her. "Give me a light, Reggie," she commanded.

Mr. Reginald Burnham hastened to obey. He had an unusually long yellow moustache, quite

out of proportion to his size, rounded shoulders, and very short arms, but his eyes were fine, even if they were not good, and there was a kind of impish fascination about him, which had brought sorrow into the life of more than one woman. Men—clean-minded, clean-living men—treated him coldly. He had knocked about in the frontiers of civilization, and he could talk for hours of his great exploits in Africa, as a hunter of big game, exploits which no one else had witnessed. So far as those were concerned, he was merely a bore, who wore a shocking bad hat, and, though Home-born, posed as the returned Colonial; but there was another, and less pleasant, side to his character—he was perfectly ready to betray anybody, if only for the sake of making conversation. Recently, he had made his own brother's most private affairs public, despite the fact that, for years past, that brother had financed him; now, he was engaged in bruiting abroad things he had learned, accidentally and in confidence, concerning Gerald Cardine and his plans.

"Yes, Sir Gerald is going to try," Reggie Burnham answered eagerly. He was the man with the news, and he was going to take full advantage of his position. "A fellow I know slightly came to me, and asked me if I would join in—they want reliable men," he twirled his long, yellow moustache. "But I wasn't taking any. It's a fool's game."

John Weste leaned forward slightly. He was a

tall, thin, hatchet-faced man, and, at times, his manner was aggressive. It seemed to be so now. "Were you approached in confidence?" he asked.

"Oh, well—of course, we're all friends here, and Mrs. Cardine, Lady Cardine, I mean, is his stepmother. So, it doesn't matter mentioning it," the little man stammered slightly, and began to fill his big pipe.

Weste laughed, unkindly. "I am afraid you would never keep a job in Fleet Street, Mr. Burnham. On the *Comet* we are not allowed to betray confidences, even to friends," then he got up abruptly, and crossed over to his hostess, "I must be going, Mrs. Cardine," he said, "there's a very important appointment I must keep. It's with your stepson."

The lady's face grew red, even under the rouge, and a very ugly word rose to her lips—even in her stage days she had been notorious for her temper; but John Weste merely shook hands, nodded to the two other men, and was gone.

Reggie Burnham ran his hands through his hair. "I say—the rotten beggar," he exclaimed, "to let me go on like that. If he tells Cardine——"

"Exactly," the man, the third man of the party, who had been listening in silence so far, spoke at last. "It might be awkward for you, but Weste won't do it. And, anyway, Gerald Cardine will have other things to think of."

Mrs. Cardine raised her eyebrows, knowing that the speaker did not talk lightly.

"In what way, Joe?" she demanded.

The Right Honourable Joseph Darkin frowned slightly. When there were others present, even men like Reggie Burnham, he liked to have the proprieties observed rigidly, remembering his South London constituents, and how important family life was in their eyes. The fact that his wife and his five children went twice every Sunday to chapel with him had won him a considerable number of votes.

No, it was most annoying when Ettie Cardine threw all caution to the winds in this way. If Burnham gave away one confidence, he would give away another.

"My dear Mrs. Cardine," he began, "you must not ask me to betray official secrets, Cabinet secrets perhaps. As you know——"

She cut him short. "I know I want a drink. Go and fetch the decanter and syphon out of the dining-room, Reggie." Then, when the little man had departed, "What is it? What are you going to do?" she asked.

For a moment he hesitated. "I—well I wasn't sure, until that little cad told us that Sir Gerald Cardine"—despite his democracy, the reverence for a title remained— "that he really intended to try and capture the island."

"And now?" she tapped her foot impatiently on the floor, whilst her black eyes flashed at

him. It struck him, not for the first time, that, though she might have a voluptuous figure, and understand various subtle methods of fascination, she was, none the less, a very dangerous woman. On these occasions, he wished he had never met her. That name of Cardine——!

"And now?" she repeated the question, imperiously. Reggie Burnham would certainly help himself to an extra, surreptitious drink before returning, but he could not be many seconds more.

He answered awkwardly, "Well, of course, we must stop it all. We must tell our friends over the water."

"Your friends, the Germans?" there was an ugly sneer on her face.

Mr. Darkin flushed. "You know I mean them," his tone was sullen now. "Lecher promised, and we must back him up. What does this country want with Katu? With our splendid programme of Social Reform waiting, to spend money on——"

Mrs. Cardine leaned forward suddenly. "Stop that, Joe," she said. "it doesn't go down—with me. I want a cheque out of the business, at once. You and Will Lecher are not going to collar the lot. I'll let you off with a hundred to-day. That'll settle the rent here, and a few oddments."

"A hundred!" he growled angrily now, being touched on his weakest spot. "D'you

think I'm made of money, Ettie? All my expenses——"

Once more, she cut him short. "I saw you had given fifty for the building fund of your mouldy old chapel. If the cheque for a hundred isn't ready by the time I've finished my first whisky and soda, it'll be a case of two hundred. See?"

"Ratty, is he?" Reggie Burnham asked as he returned with the tray, nodding his head in the direction of the dining-room, whither a very surly Cabinet Minister had retired, to write.

Mrs. Cardine nodded. "A bit," she answered. "Why did you let out before Weste?"

"Why do you have the confounded scribbler here?" he retorted.

She shrugged her shoulders. "He's amusing sometimes, and he can tell one things. . . . Oh, thanks so much, Mr. Darkin," she looked up with a brilliant smile, as he came back and handed her an envelope. "Is that the letter of introduction? You are so kind. And now, I suppose, you must go down to the House, and answer rude questions?"

Mr. Darkin nodded, none too amiably. "Yes," he answered, then looked pointedly at the other man, "Shall I give you a lift, Mr. Burnham?"

It was the lady who answered. "Oh, no He's not in a hurry. He's going to stay a little

longer, to keep me from having the blues, aren't you, Reggie?"

The front door banged savagely behind the Minister, but he was not thinking of the cheque which had been extorted from him. Only jealousy can bring the look he had into a man's eyes. It was as though he was imagining what, as a matter of fact, had just happened—Reggie Burnham moving on to the sofa beside Mrs. Cardine.

Mrs. Cardine released herself with a sudden movement, and thrusting aside the man's arm,

"Reggie," she said hoarsely, "Reggie, you'll have to go out yourself, go to Katu. You'll have to be there when it happens, to make sure."

He stood up, his face very white. "You mean—you mean——" he stuttered.

The woman laughed shrilly, hysterically.

"You know what I mean, you fool. I mean that Gerald Cardine stands between my son and the title, between my son and Cardine Place. And you've got to make sure that those niggers, or whatever else they are, don't allow Gerald Cardine to leave the island alive."

"And if I do? And if I do it for you?" The little man's eyes were blazing now. "Then you will marry me?" A man who was less in earnest might have been warned by her tone.

"Of course I will," she answered impatiently. "I want to be sure that he's dead, that's all.

It will be no loss. He's never been anything but a nuisance to every one."

Mr. Reginald Burnham's face suddenly became grave. "A hard case, a deuced hard case, Sir Gerald Cardine is, I believe," he said.

"Not so hard as you are, though, dear," her tone was caressing now, "You're the better man, and you'll see it through—for my sake."

He was as wax in her hands. Passion and vanity combined to render him incapable of thinking calmly. Almost before he knew what he had done, he had promised to go out to Katu, to be there before Gerald Cardine, to make sure that Gerald Cardine failed—and paid for his patriotism with his life

## CHAPTER XIII

### SIR GERALD CARDINE DECIDES

GERALD CARDINE was pacing the room nervously, a black frown on his face.

"You say that this beggar—what's his name? Burnham?—knows about my plans?" he demanded.

John Weste, who was in the big armchair by the hotel window, nodded. "Yes. It's a clean give-away. And that woman hates you, pretty thoroughly."

"The feeling is reciprocal," Gerald snapped out. "Who told him? Was it you, Parke?" and he turned sharply to the third man, who was lounging against the mantelpiece. The other flushed. He was quite young, a fine type of manhood physically, but still boyish in manner.

"Yes, I'm afraid I did," he answered. "I'm most awfully sorry I was such a fool, but I had had one or two whiskies, and I thought Burnham would be a good man to take along with us."

Gerald flung his cigarette end into the grate, savagely. "It's too late to be sorry now.

They'll have time to prepare, and, of course, the Germans will be put up to it at once. Who else knows ? " he turned to Weste.

For a moment, the journalist hesitated, then he seemed to take a sudden resolution, " Darkin was there, too," he answered.

" Ah, was he ? "—Gerald had become quite cool again. " Was he ? And what does that pillar of respectability do at my father's widow's flat ? "

Weste looked at him fairly and squarely. " He's there a great deal," he replied, " and he seems to resent other men going, to think he has a right to resent them going. I'm sorry, but the lady herself——"

" I know," Gerald saved him from having to finish the sentence. " She has dragged the name in the gutter " a fierce look came into his eyes, though his voice remained calm, " I hear she calls herself ' Lady Cardine.' Is that so ? "

The journalist shrugged his shoulders. " She tried it. That's how I met her first. They sent me down from the office to see her, thinking she was the real Lady Cardine ; and—well—she amused me, so I've been several times since. What a contrast, though, between the two women ! "

Sir Gerald stared out of the window. " Did you meet Lady Cardine then ? Is she home ? " he asked in a tone which he strove hard to keep natural.

Weste looked at him in surprise. "Yes. She's in Town now, I believe. At any rate, she was yesterday, because I saw her at the office, coming out of the chief's room." He said no more, but remained watching the other out of half-closed eyes, wondering. He had only seen the ex-trader of Mati once before, but he had already come to the conclusion that he was well worth studying. "Something wrong somewhere," was his mental comment.

It was young Parke who broke the silence. He had been fidgetting nervously with his cigarette case, and now he seemed to have made up his mind to take some definite step. "I say, Sir Gerald," he began, "I'm awfully sorry I made that bloomer, telling that little rotter about your scheme. If you'll let me try——"

Gerald turned quickly, and put a kindly hand on his arm. "Never mind, old man. It's a lost cause, anyway. Perhaps it's as well you did, because now I shall hurry out, and get it finished. . . But I've been thinking it over, very seriously; and I shan't take either of you with me. I'm not going to have the responsibility of leading you into a death-trap."

It seemed as though Parke's boyishness dropped from him, suddenly. His jaw set, and his eyes flashed.

"Don't be a damned fool, Cardine," he growled. "You're my chief now, and I follow you, right

through. Especially as my own idiocy—or vice—has made it fifty times as hard for you. I'd sooner be cut up in the mountains of Katu, than kill myself with whisky here. . . . And it's one or the other."

Then Weste spoke, very quietly. "And I shall go, because it's the best chance any man on the staff of the *Comet* was ever given—and because I believe in my leader."

The hard lines had gone out of Gerald's face now. "Thanks," he muttered, a little brokenly. "Even if I—if we all—go down, the story will get Home, and it may rouse the public, in time. It's everything to me, to get this thing through. I—I haven't any particular reason for hanging on to life, beyond that."

Once more, John Weste narrowed his eyes, and watched the other, as though trying to solve some problem. Suddenly, "You know Lady Cardine?" he asked.

"I've met her," Gerald answered, rather curtly; then, hurriedly, went on to talk of his plans.

The guns had already been shipped to Singapore on a tramp steamer. It had been an easier matter than Gerald had anticipated. Cardine of Cardine Place could do some things, or have some things done for him, which would have been difficult, or almost impossible, for an unknown man. He had gone to a manufacturer, who happened also to be an English gentleman, and

had, therefore, taken the word of one of his own caste, without asking indiscreet questions.

"I had hoped to get several more white men, as I told you, Parke," Gerald said frankly, "And I had hoped, too, to raise some more money. Practically all mine has gone now, and we shall need it, horribly, to pay our men, and bribe the chiefs. What I got from your paper, too, is spent, Weste. I can't very well beg, you see" —it was the head of the Cardines speaking now— "and, even if I could, men don't give very readily to secret funds. There's no advertisement attached to doing so."

Raja Ismail was unpopular, bitterly unpopular, outside Mati itself, Gerald explained. He had told both of his hearers the whole facts before, but now, when he grew excited, or tired, he had a trick of reiteration, as Weste was quick to notice. The mountain people—and Katu consists mainly of mountains—hated their ruler, and hated, even more, the German firm which was bleeding him, and them, dry. They were quite ready to revolt —or, rather, ready to take part in an insurrection, which would give them an opportunity of raiding their neighbours—and, if they had a leader who could provide them with arms and ammunition, the rank and file, at least, would be ready to begin at any moment.

On the other hand, the chiefs had more caution, or more common-sense. They wanted to be sure of some profit beforehand, and it would be diffi-

cult to rouse their enthusiasm, save by means of a cash payment.

"Abdulla, who is the biggest of the lot, and, incidentally, the biggest scoundrel, will do nothing without money in advance," Gerald said. "Still, I shall get some of his men, whilst there's another blackguard, called Ali Hajji—a ladrone, really—who will join us, if he thinks we are going to loot Mati. I shall have to let them do that, I expect."

The other two men exchanged glances, then young Parke laughed.

"By Jove, Sir Gerald, you're the limit! Haven't you any kind of scruples or conscience at all? What is going to happen to the people of Mati, the good people?"

Gerald did not laugh. "I've no scruples in this matter," he retorted. "It's an Imperial question, not my private concern. . . . And the Empire has got to go on . . . a few natives' lives, even a few white men's lives—what do those count, when you reckon up the millions, the tens of millions? If Germany gets Katu, and we lose control of the world's Highway, as we might easily do—!" He broke off suddenly, and, crossing to the table, began to sort out some papers.

After a while, he looked up. "They can leave in time, the decent people of Mati. I shall send a warning to some one there. As for the rest——"

"Yes, as for the rest?" John Weste asked quietly.

"There are one or two whom I am going to kill myself," Gerald retorted. "At least, I hope to kill them. This is going to be a fight to the finish. I mean to go down fighting," his eyes sparkled for a moment. "The more I think of it, the smaller our chances seem to be. And yet——"

The journalist supplied the missing words:

"And yet, if I get my story into the *Comet*, it will all have been worth while. But, God, sir, it'll rouse men—Englishmen—as nothing else has ever done, ever may do, perhaps."

Young Parke was rolling a cigarette. "But it seems to me as if we shan't have much chance of seeing the end of the show," he drawled.

Weste turned on him fiercely—there was no question now of the Fleet Street man's enthusiasm.

"What the blazes does that matter—will that matter—so long as we have the starting of it all?" he demanded.

Parke thrust out his hand. "Good man!" he grunted, "I'm glad you think as I do. One meets so many rotters now-a-days, especially in the Service. That's why I chucked it—tradesmen's sons, you know, swanking on what their fathers had collected in the County Courts. This sort of show wouldn't suit 'em. Not much!"

A waiter knocked at the door, then thrust in his head. "Wanted on the 'phone, sir," he

said to Gerald. "Party of the name of Gloag, from the *Daily Comet*."

Five minutes later, Gerald Cardine returned: "Gloag wants me urgently," he said. "I must go down to Fleet Street. I don't think there's much else to fix up with you fellows. You'll be ready to sail on Thursday? That's right."

Parke came forward. "I say, old man, it was a rotten thing for me to do—telling that bounder, Burnham. I'll find him, and punch his head before we go."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," Gerald Cardine was the commander-in-chief now. "Leave him alone. He'll come to some bad end—especially if he's mixed up with my father's widow," he would never say the word "stepmother"—"Perhaps I'm not sorry you gave the show away. It has stirred me up!"

Still, though he might claim to have been stirred, when the others had gone he sank back into an armchair, limp and haggard, fingering his lips unsteadily.

"My God," he muttered, "It's growing, growing, all the time. It's seven pills a day, now, a grain and three-quarters of morphia. In another fortnight, it'll be eight a day . . . I promised you, I promised you, Margaret! But why didn't you keep me to it? You know what it means. And I'm alone, so utterly alone."

For a few moments he seemed to be sobbing;

then he sat up, took one of the fatal little white pills out of the box, and swallowed it.

Ten minutes later, when he entered the taxi-cab, he was smart and erect, so much so that the Press photographer, who was in waiting, secured a most excellent picture.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE SINEWS OF WAR

GLOAG of the *Comet* rose heavily to greet his visitor. He did most things heavily ; it was his way ; yet, on this occasion there was cordiality in his glance, as well as in his handshake.

" Glad you came at once, Sir Gerald," he said. " Sit down. . . . Seen Weste ? Fixed up with him ? . . . Good. He'll suit you—a hard case. . . . And now I've got some good news and some bad news for you."

Gerald smiled ; for the moment, the morphia had pulled him together entirely.

" Let me have the bad news first," he answered.

The editor nodded. " Well, it's this—your scheme has been given away. I've got the whole story on offer, now."

If he expected his visitor to be surprised, he was mistaken. Gerald merely smiled again.

" From whom ? " he asked.

Gloag understood that the news was stale. " From a man called Burnham," he answered. " I'm not going to use it, of course, though I intended to hold it up as long as possible ; but now

I've heard, through a side wind, that the *Planet*, the Government paper, has just got it too."

"From Burnham also?" Gerald's question came sharply.

The other shook his head. "No, from Joseph Darkin." As he pronounced the name, he watched his visitor as John Weste had watched him an hour or two before, out of narrowed eyes.

But Gerald Cardine seemed quite unconscious of the scrutiny. He was staring out of the window, his face hard and set. At last:

"I knew that Darkin knew," he said slowly. "He heard it to-day at—at Mrs. Cardine's flat. It—it rather tends to spoil the show."

Gloag smiled grimly. "I should think it had spoiled it, altogether. Even if you deny it all, Germany will be on the alert; and even if—as is most likely—the *Planet* does not publish it, Lecher will hear it from Darkin, and send word to his friends in Berlin. I don't see that you've got a chance left."

"Still, I shall go on with it," Gerald retorted. "And now for your good news."

The editor's eyes had narrowed even more. It was a favourite trick of his when he wished to make sure of his man, though, so far, this particular man's character seemed to puzzle him. He could not get a grip of its essential points, much less of its details. Now, he was going to try another method of surprising his visitor into self-revelation. He spoke stiffly, formally.

"I have been commissioned to tell you, Sir Gerald, that, within the next twenty-four hours, a sum of money will be placed to your credit, at your bankers, to the purpose of your—your venture."

A slight frown flitted across Gerald's face. It was rather a curious way of making the announcement. Then,

"How large a sum?" he asked.

This time, Gloag's eyes searched his face, almost hungrily.

"Half a million pounds sterling," he answered.

"Ah!" Gerald gripped the arms of his chair, gripped them very hard, and his face went a little white. "Ah! That will be useful!" but he asked no questions.

What was the good of asking, when he knew? There were not many people who could have done this for him, and only one who would have done it—Margaret Cardine. And he did not fall into the error of thinking that it had been done for the nation, or the Empire. It was because he was a Cardine, and because of her intense gratitude to a man of that name. Then, for a moment, wholly unreasonably, he was savagely jealous, jealous of the old man whom they had buried off Sudang Heads. Sir Charles was, and always must be, uppermost in her mind.

The mood passed quickly, or, at any rate, he came back to practical things. Now, he could buy all the chiefs, even buy the Raja himself.

Ismail would probably jump at the idea of a lump sum, which would free him from Carl Gunther's clutches.

" I can use it, use it all," he said slowly. " It will just make the difference."

Gloag's eyes had never left his visitor's face. Now, he was beginning to understand part of the story. " And I was to tell you that, if necessary, there would be another half a million pounds. Only, I was to tell you that there was one condition."

Gerald flushed. He guessed what was coming. " Yes ? " he asked. " What is it ? "

" That you kept a certain promise," the other answered. " I was not told the nature of that promise."

Suddenly, Gerald got up. That promise—he had not kept it. " Promise not to increase the doses," she had said ; and yet he had increased them. Knowing himself to be doomed, seeing no possibility of escape from the drug, he had let it have its way, using it merely as a stimulant to keep him up to his purpose. Without it, he felt he could do nothing, that all his resolution would collapse.

That promise ! He had remembered it often, constantly. Really, during his waking moments, Margaret had never been out of his mind ; and there had ever been a lurking sense of shame at his non-fulfilment of that promise ; but he had tried to salve his conscience with the idea that

she had forgotten, that she did not care, that he was nothing to her—save as the man who had ousted her from Cardine Place.

She had taken no notice of him, had never sent him a word of any kind. Even now, there was not a line. There was only this magnificent gift, given in memory of her husband.

"Well, you accept the gift—and the condition?" Gloag's voice recalled him, abruptly, to the present.

Gerald nodded. Somehow, he would do it; somehow he would contrive to manage on the amount he was taking now. He could not possibly refuse the money. It might mean so much —to the Empire. It might make all the difference between success and failure. He himself was doomed—he had no doubt or hope on that point —but he would secure Katu, secure control of the Trade Route of the World, secure it for the Empire.

Not for one moment did he think of the money as being given to himself personally. It was for the scheme, his scheme. Like Sir Charles, Margaret had understood. She might almost have been a Cardine by birth. Almost! What a fool he was! Almost! Why, even the greatest of the Cardines had done no more than she was doing.

Of course, it was all being done for the Empire. She had never troubled about him, personally; otherwise, there would not have been this long

silence. She was insisting on his keeping to his promise, because she feared he would break down before he was through with his task—and no Cardine had ever yet failed in that sort of way.

Half a million sterling, and the promise of another half million, if he needed it! It was splendid, glorious! He ought to have been the happiest, or, at any rate, the most elated, man in London at that moment. Yet the fact remained that he was unhappy, terribly so.

He was going away, going away within a few days, to his death. Not only would he never see this most glorious of women again, but, though she was ready to pour out her money for the cause, she would not even vouchsafe him a line, nothing beyond that reminder to keep himself efficient—for the sake of the cause, not for her sake.

He was going to his death. Already, he had reached that stage when the morphia-taker has no hope left, when he sees himself, sees the conditions, with horrible clarity, yet sees no way out, save in death. He was rotting away, body and soul. To-day, morphia was life to him, just as it would be death to-morrow.

In a sense, he had ceased to resent it all. It was Fate. There had been a time when he had burned with savage anger against the young fool of a doctor who had given him the poison in the first case; now, that seemed a vague memory. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered—except, to keep up his stock of those tiny white pills

and to seize Katu for the Empire before those pills killed him.

Nothing else mattered—at least, nothing would have mattered, had the "White Lady" never come to Mati Harbour. He tried to tell himself now that that was really nothing, after all, except in so far as it had secured him the money for his campaign.

Katu was everything to him, everything—he repeated that to himself, fiercely. He lived for it, kept himself alive for it, only for it—at least, he told himself so.

Yet he would have relinquished all his schemes, all his hopes, all his pride of patriotism, all his Cardine traditions, to be able to go to Margaret Cardine and tell her that he had not touched morphia for twenty-four hours, to tell her that he was once more master of his own body and his own soul.

He clenched his hands, as he thought of the look which would come into those glorious eyes.

## CHAPTER XV

### DREAMS AND REALITIES

"THE promise will be kept." Gerald spoke slowly, deliberately. "I will fulfil the condition. You may tell my—my unknown helper that, on the word of Gerald Cardine."

Gloag nodded. It seemed as if the assurance was quite sufficient. The breaking of promises was not part of the way of the Cardines.

He began to re-arrange the papers on his desk with rather exaggerated care. It was not a pleasant task having to say, "Good-bye" to a man for whom you had conceived an immense respect, saying, "Good-bye" for ever—at least "for ever" in all human probability.

"There is nothing more, I suppose," he held out one of those huge hands of his. "Weste will do his part. Good luck, Sir Gerald—and *au revoir*."

There was more than a hint of sadness in the younger man's eyes as he gripped that hand.

"Make it 'good-bye' instead," he answered huskily, "that's safer. . . . I'll try and make sure that Weste gets through, gets back. And

the other fellow—but as to myself—" he shrugged his shoulders, then his eyes grew suspiciously bright. " Tell my—my unknown friend that the money will not be wasted."

Instead of going straight back to his hotel, Gerald turned down towards the Embankment, along which he walked, very slowly, deep in thought. A normal man, having received a wholly unexpected gift of half a million, wherewith to carry on the scheme on which he was staking everything, and feeling certain, too, that it came from the woman he loved, would have been treading on air, excited, jubilant almost. But Gerald Cardine was not normal. Always, the thought of the morphia seemed to overshadow everything else. Now, he was thinking far more of the condition attached than of what use he could make of the gift.

He must play the game, keep his promise. At all costs, he must do that. Her faith in him should not be misplaced. He had fought very hard of late—really, he had been fighting for the past two years, ever since he had found the effect the drug was having—but he could not truthfully declare that he had kept that first promise, or half-promise, made on the deck of the " White Lady." He had increased the daily amount of morphia, and, of late, he had decided to cease fighting any more against it. Margaret Cardine had seemed to have passed out of his life again, to have forgotten him, and except for the coming

struggle in Katu, a struggle which must, of necessity, be short, there was nothing left.

He stood against the low stone wall, staring across the river at the shot tower, staring with unseeing eyes. Why, oh why, had it come too late, this love of his life, this glimpse of Heaven given to a soul in Hell?

That was it—a soul in Hell. He repeated the words to himself, again and again. A soul in Hell! In the Hell of its own making. The excuse, the common one of all morphia-takers, that he had not understood the danger, was, after all, a futile one. Who can have sympathy with a fool?

Yet she had sympathised. For a moment, he felt a thrill of joy as he remembered her words. She had understood, having been down into that same Hell herself; but she had conquered evil, and had come back again, to sanity and the joy of life.

She had sympathised, because she understood, and also because she was Margaret Cardine, most perfect of women—at least in his eyes. But sympathy was not love; and, having conquered the demon herself, she was the less likely to forgive his failure to conquer it.

Ordinarily an unemotional man, he suddenly flung out his hands towards the river, as if in protest against Fate.

Why should he have learnt the secret of life, learnt it when it was too late, learnt that there is

only one thing that matters—the love of woman ? It was a brutal jest on the part of Fate. Before he met Margaret Cardine, he had been more or less resigned. He was doomed, but he was going to put up a good fight for the possession of Katu, and he had schooled himself into thinking that that would be a compensation for all he was losing ; but now he knew, now he understood.

Nothing, not even the welfare of the Empire, not even the upholding of the Cardine Tradition, could compensate him for the fact that he would be leaving the world which held Margaret Cardine.

Too late ! Too late ! The words re-echoed through his brain. Morphia alone kept him alive, and morphia would kill him, or drive him to his death.

Suddenly, he wanted to live. For a moment, at least, the grim morbidity bred of the drug seemed to clear away from his brain. After all, it was a fair and beautiful world, if only because it was the world which held Margaret Cardine. To live, to be a free man again, master of his own destiny, of his own body, free to woo the most perfect of women—once more the soul in Hell had a glimpse of Heaven.

To be the husband of Margaret Cardine, to worship her, to have the right to worship her, with his mind as well as with his body, to have her beside him always,—night and day, to have her tender care, her loving sympathy, to have her

nestling down beside him. . . . There would be some wonderful, indescribable fragrance about her, some thrill in the touch of her flesh, her hair would sweep his face. . . .

She was no longer the woman who had given him half a million—that fact seemed so hopelessly unimportant, save as showing that she remembered ; she was the woman he loved, the woman for the sake of whose love he would have sacrificed everything, anything.

The fragrance there must be, the glory of holding her in his arms, her dear body—then, suddenly, he came back to earth, to the earth he was doomed to leave.

A passer-by looked round sharply as he heard Gerald Cardine's laugh, then hurried on.

" Like a fiend from the Pit," he muttered.

Once more, it was a hideously drab world, a world which no really sensible man would regret leaving. Of course, Margaret had done it, made him that wonderful gift, for the sake of her husband's memory. Sir Charles had left her a huge sum, and she could afford to give generously to the very last object in which he had been interested.

" I'm an utter fool," Gerald told himself bitterly, as he turned away from the river. " What should I have to offer her, anyway ? She has the money, and the title, already. . . . She loved him, that grim old man, and it is because of him that she's done this. . . . Never a

word for me, though she knows I shall probably not come back."

Then, unconsciously at first, his fingers went up to his mouth—the old, dreaded sign. A few minutes later, those same fingers began to feel terribly swollen, though they were not so in reality. By the time he reached his hotel, his feet were dragging slightly, his eyes were dull, whilst every nerve in his body seemed to be crying out for the drug.

He dropped into a seat in the lounge, ordered a brandy and soda, and, with unsteady hand, extracted one of those fatal pills from their little tube.

"An extra one, quite an extra one," he muttered. "It's been a heavy day, so I won't count this one. . . . Bad thing though. I seem to have got into the way of not counting extra ones lately. Bad thing though," he swallowed it down, finished his brandy and soda at one gulp, then lay back, with eyes closed, apparently asleep. When he opened those eyes again, much of their glazed expression had vanished; also, the hand which he put out to ring for another drink was quite steady. He was beginning to feel the stimulating effects of the drug—the brandy, of course, was as nothing to him. He laughed quietly, with a kind of savage, concentrated bitterness. "An extra one, already! And I have promised! Still, she understands how the filthy stuff makes us into a Brotherhood of Liars. . . . And I

shall spend her money as she meant it to be spent, even if I can't observe her condition. She understands."

Five minutes later, a new mood was on him. The drug had acted fully. He was alert, sharp, apparently a normal man, making pencil notes of future expenditure on the backs of some old letters.

Half-a-million, five hundred thousand pounds sterling! At last, he realised all that it must mean. For that sum he could buy all the chiefs of Katu, including the Raja himself. He clenched his hands suddenly. No! Ismail should not have one cent of the money, of Margaret's money, of a white woman's money. Long ago, he had promised himself the joy of killing Ismail, and he was not going to forgo it.

He could buy Albert Darkin, the trader, buy his brother, Joseph Darkin, the Cabinet Minister, as well, buy Lecher, the Labour Member too, and enough of the lesser fry in Parliament to ensure a majority for his scheme, but he was not going to do it. His money should never go in bribes to that scum. He would fight them openly, fairly, would bring the issue into the open, as other Cardines before him had done, in similar cases. To buy an Oriental chieftain was one thing —the Asiatic must always be paid in that way; but for Cardine of Cardine Place to buy his political adversaries was unthinkable. Such had never been the way of the Cardines. And both she,

and the great English gentleman who lay slung between the fire-bars, off Sudang Heads, would have hated him to do it.

He rolled a cigarette and lighted it reflectively. For the time being, the extra morphia had rendered his mind perfectly clear, and he was able to arrive at some decision.

Yes, he would cable at once to Wang Tu Fu, in Singapore, and Wang Tu Fu would lose no time in getting into touch with the chiefs in Katu. The Chinese banker knew his business thoroughly.

And then, from the next table, where sat three Englishmen of the wholesome type, lean and short-haired, with the Public School stamp on them, with unostentatious clothes, wholly devoid of padding, came words which made Gerald Cardine prick up his ears, words which absolutely wiped away a possibility of his giving up the Katu venture.

"Yes," one of the men drawled. "The First Lord of the Admiralty understands, just as old Charlie Cardine did. . . . The crisis with Germany and the railway strike coming simultaneously. . . . The First Lord's speech in the House to-day, about the huge oil reservoirs they've put up so quietly, and the number of warships able to use oil fuel—it was fine. . . . To see some of those fellows exchanging glances! They had thought they could use him, and earn the Kaiserlick's money, easily. . . . Lecher

rushed out of the House, more sea-green than usual."

The other men laughed, a little harshly. "The Poor Incorruptible!" the one in the morning suit remarked.

The first speaker grunted, "Robespierre died poor; Lecher won't do so. . . . And if Germany got a post in the East, a really good naval base . . ."

Gerald could catch no more, although he strained his ears. They finished their drinks, then, as they passed him on their way out, a few words, a fragment of a sentence, drifted to him.

"Ettie Cardine's latest—did you hear the yarn? They say——"

The man who was sitting alone ground his teeth. It was time he left England.

## CHAPTER XVI

### MARGARET SENDS A MESSAGE

THE Bank manager was suave, almost deferential. During the last few hours, his views on the subject of Sir Gerald Cardine had changed entirely. Hitherto, he had regarded him—privately, of course—as a "beggarly baronet," who was rapidly depleting his account; now, with half a million paid in, in a lump sum, he remembered that Cardine of Cardine Place must always be a great personage, greater than the majority of the members of the peerage.

Gerald gave no outward signs of elation, when he found that the money had actually been placed to his credit. The night had been a bad one for him, and his hand was still unsteady when he sat down to draw the largest cheque he had ever signed. He had been trying to observe the condition attached to the gift, and had gone without one pill because he had taken an extra one during the day.

He had succeeded—but at a fearful cost. That last hour, when he had watched the hands of the clock creeping round with deadly slowness! An hour only! It had seemed a lifetime, an

age! First the lips, then the seemingly-swollen hands, then that appalling tingling throughout the whole system, and always the horror and loathing of the drug, combined with the knowledge that the drug could give him relief! A soul in Hell! A soul in Hell, which had had a glimpse of Heaven!

Yet, shaken though he was, he knew that she would have applauded him. Perhaps, she would even have laid her cool, steady hand on his, and, looking into his face with those glorious eyes of hers, have said something, a word or two, which would have repaid him for the ghastly terrors of the night.

She knew. She, herself, had been through it, and she must have conquered it, or she could not have spoken of it as she had done, could not have possessed that wonderful complexion, that sweet and gentle calmness, coupled with quiet strength. His own face was becoming puffy, almost bloated. Every day he had grown more certain of that, and, in his heart of hearts, more afraid of a chance meeting with her. She would know, and would grieve, and her grief would be the hardest thing he had yet had to bear.

A soul in Hell! How, that phrase seemed to haunt him! Yes, but with the knowledge of that one pill untaken, that pitiful, quarter-grain fragment saved, Heaven seemed still to be open, still to be a fact, even if it could never be a possibility for him.

He was trying to keep his promise. For a few short hours, since he had recovered from the shocks of the previous day, he had kept it, and, weak and inert though he was, there was a new sense of self-respect in him.

But it was too late, always too late. He had gone too far ; he could see no future which did not include the taking of morphia—and morphia means death. For the man who takes morphia there can be no thought of marriage, no thought of happiness. He may love—probably he will love, wildly, savagely, hopelessly—but it will just be one more agony, the greatest of all agonies, for him to bear.

He is beyond the Pale. . . .

" I was instructed to give you this, Sir Gerald." It was the bank manager's prim voice. He had been a most estimable person all his life, that same manager. He belonged to a suburban family of good repute, People of Position ; he had never been out of a billet, and could not understand how any one whom he and his family could possibly know could ever be placed so unfortunately. He had never been served with a County Court summons, had never missed going to church on Sunday, or sending one of his family in his place. When he died, he would be most annoyed with St. Peter, if that Personage could not tell him of any change in the bank rate. Even though the Apostle had started life as a fisherman, he had had time to learn the code of the Victorian Age, the

worship of the Supremely Bad in Art and the Supremely Smug in Morals.

Baronets are bad, of course—at least, they are in Victorian literature—yet the suburbs are beginning to forgive them, and this particular baronet had just had five hundred thousand pounds placed to his credit.

"My friend, Sir Gerald Cardine—you know, of Cardine Place, the heir of Sir Charles"—the manager fully intended using those words in the train to Sydenham that night, even though, at heart, he had doubts concerning the real respectability of this prematurely-grey young man. He would not look in place carrying the bag in church.

Sir Gerald Cardine took the note with an unsteady hand—the manager noted the unsteadiness, and was duly grieved.

"Thanks," he said. "If there's anything more, I'll let you know. Anyway, I shall sail the day after to-morrow. I can send an answer to this through you, if necessary," but he made no attempt to open the note until he was outside; then he read,

"Those who love you wish you good luck, and pray for your safe return."

That was all. There was not even an initial, not even a date; but he knew, instinctively, from whom it came.

Very carefully he folded it up again. That scrap of paper, the first he had ever received from Margaret Cardine, would be his talisman. If any-

thing could save him, that should do so. Then, with a start, he remembered the time. He had gained an hour on the morphia, and yet he was not really shaky. He might possibly make that hour into two hours.

Was her influence guiding and guarding him, after all ?

There was a new flush on his face, an unwonted elasticity in his stride. In the end, he held out for two and a half hours longer than usual.

After he had taken the pill, he drew the note from his pocket, and very reverently kissed it.

Anything that her dear hand had touched—— !

He was a sane, cool man of business when, half an hour later, he settled down to make the final arrangements before leaving England. Young Parke, who had been busy with farewells, steadied himself quickly when he received instructions to go out and buy certain things.

" But I thought money was so short," he ventured to remonstrate. " And these run up to " he glanced up the list " one-fifty—two—three—oh, a full five hundred pounds."

Gerald handed him some notes. " There's six hundred then," he answered curtly. " Be as quick as you can."

The other seemed to hesitate, then, suddenly, his eyes were wet. " I wonder you trust me," he said, brokenly, " after the rotten thing I did, giving the show away to that cad Burnham. But I shan't play the fool again."

"I know you won't, or I shouldn't be taking you," Gerald retorted. Still, though the words might sound harsh, the look in his eyes was kindly.

Then, very carefully, he set to work coding a long cable to Singapore. Whilst he was busy with that task, the waiter brought in some letters. One, as he noticed immediately, was from Patsy Wrench, but he pushed it aside with the others. He could see about her later on. But several times he put his hand on the pocket where Margaret Cardine's note lay.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE WAY OF A CHINAMAN

WANG TU FU, that astute and reliable Chinese banker in Singapore, took off his glasses, and wiped them carefully. As a matter of fact, he had no need to wear them at all, but they seemed, somehow, to add to his dignity, to harmonise with his perfectly cut white duck suits, of which he always wore at least two a day.

He had not been surprised at the contents of the cable which he had just de-coded, but he had been pleased, foreseeing much profit to himself, and, Oriental though he was, he had been flattered at the Englishman's recognition of his honesty and ability. In all probability, there was not an Englishman, or a European of any sort, in Singapore to whom that commission would have been entrusted without any sort of safeguards.

He was a rich man himself—too rich a man ever to return to China, and be robbed by the local Viceroy—but this was by far the largest sum of money he had ever handled. For a moment he wondered when and how this Gerald Cardine, whom he had known before as Gerald

Raithe, had secured it ; then he put that question on one side, as being no concern of his, and set to work to carry out his commission.

Wang Tu Fu's chief clerk was as efficient as he was discreet and rapid in his methods. Whilst his employer was interviewing other great Chinese merchants, and arranging that, in the event of his own death, Gerald Cardine should be at no loss—for such is the way of the Heathen Chinee, whom we insult through the medium of our missionary boxes—the chief clerk was buying a small steamer, on which Wang Tu Fu could travel to Katu, buying, too, the services, and the silence, of a skipper who knew the coast of Katu, who had quarrelled with Carl Gunther, and had been fined by order of Raja Ismail, a black-bearded giant named James Hume.

It was barely sundown when the little steamer —she had been known under various names, but was now called the " San José "—slipped out of Singapore Harbour. So far as bulk was concerned, the cargo which the new owner had brought aboard had been a ridiculously small one ; but the cases had been heavy.

" Silver dollars ? " Captain Hume had turned sharply to his smiling owner.

The Celestial had nodded ; whereupon the skipper had thrust a revolver into his own pocket, and had offered another to Wang Tu Fu.

" One ships hard cases in a port like this," he had explained.

Wang Tu Fu had accepted the pistol, at the same time patting his hip pocket.

" One there already, but two better than one," he remarked.

As they went out, the " San José " passed close to that trim-looking schooner, the " Zeta." The Chinaman, who was on the bridge beside the skipper, nodded towards the other vesssl.

" She may want a captain, when we get back, if this trip is a success," his English was perfect.

Captain Hume chewed off the end of his Manila cigar. " Gerald Raithe coming back ? " he asked. " But what about this craft ? "

Wang Tu Fu shrugged his shoulders. " I shall sell her again. There was a hurry, you see ; and it was quicker to buy than to charter."

The skipper lighted his cigar very carefully, cursed the man at the wheel in the language used East of Suez, then, " Plenty of money ? " he asked.

" Yes, plenty of money," the other nodded, knowing his man. Captain Hume might have served six months in Capetown for kicking an insolent half-caste—a relative of a Cabinet Minister of the new Union variety—off his bridge, and some owners might have looked askance at him ; but Wang Tu Fu had once lent him money, without security, being a student of human nature ; and had got that money back, with interest, which was why he had told his chief clerk to engage the man on his own terms.

It is not every day that a Chinese merchant finds his own standard of honesty amongst members of that nation which spends so much time in trying to convert him. The standard of those who receive, and spend, the money of the subscribers is the one he usually encounters.

For a full minute, Captain Hume puffed reflectively at his cigar. He was beginning to remember certain vague rumours, and to understand; moreover, though he held very strong views on the colour question—everything that had black blood at all was black to him—he took the sane view that you meet a Chinaman on neutral ground, that he is different from all other coloured peoples, and for this particular Chinaman, with the bland smile and the gold-rimmed glasses, he had a very sincere affection and respect.

"So this is Gerald Raithe's game," he said at last. The Chinaman nodded. It was safe to give his confidence, and it would make matters easier.

"He is Sir Gerald Cardine, really," he answered.

It was not often that the black-bearded sailor dropped his cigar, but he did so on this occasion.

"Cardine of Cardine Place!" he exclaimed. "I was born there. What a fool I was not to have spotted it—the Cardine manner and the Cardine face. . . . Gerald Cardine, eh? Sir Gerald Cardine, Baronet. Good luck to him. We must drink his health." He hailed the Goanese

steward, ordering drinks to be brought at once. "So he's Cardine, and he's coming back! Why? Why?" he turned almost fiercely to the Celestial. "Raithe—Cardine, I mean—understood about Katu. Is that the game?"

Once more, Wang Tu Fu proved that, even though the Western nations might not understand him, he understood them. It would have been futile to lie to an honourable man whom you intend to use.

"Yes, it's Katu," he answered quietly. "The guns will be in my warehouse next week; Sir Gerald sails to-morrow. Now, we go to give presents to certain chiefs."

Captain Hume drew a deep breath. "I'm on the stage in this piece, all through. But Carl Gunther's mine. He called me a certain name. Young Cardine—Sir Gerald, I should say—is not going to save him."

Wang Tu Fu stared at the horizon. "I am not sure that Sir Gerald Cardine would try very hard to save Herr Gunther, or the Raja Ismail, or Mr. Albert Darkin. Before he left, he told me many things. . . . Yet now there is money enough to buy all those three."

Somehow, his words seemed to jar. "Damn the money," the skipper retorted, roughly. "It's not a question of that. The Squareheads shan't collar Katu; and I've accounts of my own to settle there." Then, perhaps because he wanted an outlet for his feelings, he began to express

his opinions concerning the female ancestors of the steward.

The story of that cruise of the "San José" would be difficult to write; also, the writing of it might be indiscreet. It might offend Germany, which would mean that Mr. Lecher and those who sit with him in Parliament would be cross. True, they would not be cross enough to refuse to draw their four hundred pounds per annum from the nation, even though some of them might be drawing far more from other nations, but it would hurt their feelings to read of plucky things done in the service of the Empire, to learn that there are still men ready to give their lives in the service of the Empire, to learn, too, that the heathen in his blindness, of whom they hear in their conventicles, just before the missionary bag goes round, can be, and often is, infinitely more honourable than themselves. He could not well be less honourable.

Briefly, the "San José" avoided Mati altogether—in fact, Mati knew nothing of her coming to Katu; but, on the other hand, she felt her way into half a dozen small bays, with a coral reef almost closing the entrance, a white beach, with cocoanut palms almost concealing the nipa-shacks behind, and mangrove swamps at the ends of the points.

Wang Tu Fu seemed to know his business, and the natives seemed to know him. In each case, he went ashore at once, and remained there,

alone, unarmed, until some one came down from the hills to see him. Then, after an interval, one of those boxes of silver dollars would be landed, and the Chinaman would return, cool, collected, inscrutable as ever.

Once—it was when they were leaving Kilini—a couple of magazine rifles began to yap out at them from the mangrove swamp, rendering it advisable for Hume and himself to take shelter in the charthouse, but Wang Tu Fu merely wiped his glasses reflectively and cut a fresh cigar.

" Mausers or Mannlichers—at any rate, Square-head rifles," the skipper grunted.

The Celestial nodded. " Hertz and Co. have a store here," then relapsed into silence.

Captain Hume, who had picked up a cordite Express rifle, peered through the porthole.

" The worst of mangroves is that they afford such splendid cover," he sighed, then he let rip at what looked like a scrap of a white jacket. He never knew whether or no he hit, but there was some satisfaction in the feeling that he might have done so.

They went out of the bay in style, tootling their syren as if in defiance. A final bullet from the mangrove swamp ripped through the funnel, coming out with a tear two inches across. The skipper shook his head.

" I can't complain of you, officially," he growled, " but I'll get square with you yet, one of these days. You won't forget me," a prophecy which

was likely to come true, considering that, even then, young Rudolf Hertz was wondering vaguely why a cordite Express bullet through the hand could hurt so horribly. Yet the skipper had fired only once.

That evening, as they entered Sudang Heads, James Hume had the ensign dipped, standing himself with bared head on the bridge.

"I'm glad the sun wasn't down," he said to the Chinaman, who had also raised his topee. "This is one of the finest harbours in the world, and it's going to be ours. So I must salute. It makes you feel kind of religious. Here, you son of an immoral female dog," to the Goanese steward, "Bring whisky and soda here, plenty quick, savee?"

The Chinaman smiled. The religious ceremonies of the Western nations always struck him as being amusing. Still, he drank to the success of Gerald Cardine's venture with perfect sincerity. It would be to the benefit of every Chinese merchant for Great Britain to hold Katu, whilst it would be a disaster for it to fall into the hands of those foolish Germans, with their hosts of officials and their lack of capital. The chief of his guild in Singapore had given him very definite instructions. Even had Gerald Cardine not been able to pay well, the whole weight of the Chinese influence would have been behind him. And, in those waters, the Chinese influence is no small thing. The Chinaman of fact and the

Chinaman for whose benefit we collect the children's pennies are two very different persons. The former actually exists ; the latter is usually represented by a smug Englishman, with a round collar, a black frock coat, and a host of hungry friends and relatives, anxious to share in the spoils, by being sent abroad at large salaries.

" Half the battleships of the world could lie here, and still leave room for the fifty biggest liners," Captain Hume remarked, as he handed his empty glass to the Goanese steward. " What a harbour ! I would snap my fingers at a typhoon once I was inside. And no use made of it—yet ! Just that collection of native shacks and a few dug-outs ! What a people ! "

Wang Tu Fu readjusted his spectacles. " There are also some sailing boats—and a large steam launch," he remarked.

The skipper sniffed. " Sailing boats ! They look as if the late George Washington had made them with his little axe ; and as for the launch," he had a careful look through the glasses, " she's the one that used to belong to Cain and Digbly in Deli ; they sold her to a man called Blackwood in Mati."

" I sold her for them," the Celestial murmured.

The " San José " anchored a bare hundred yards from the launch, and, within a very few minutes, the boat from the latter was alongside, a European lady in the stern.

" Hullo ! So it's you back, Captain Hume," Patsy Wrench hailed the skipper joyfully. " I

didn't expect to see you again, in these waters," but an anxious look came into her face when she saw the bland countenance of Wang Tu Fu. " I'll come aboard," she said, rather hurriedly.

Once they were in the charthouse, whither the skipper conducted her, she went straight to the point.

" This is Jerry's business—Sir Gerald Cardine's business, I mean ? I know now that his real name is Cardine." Her tone was quick, insistent.

The Chinaman nodded. Gerald had spoken much of Miss Wrench and her knowledge of his scheme, and that long cable message had also mentioned her.

" Yes," he answered slowly. " It is that business. I have a message for you. It is that you are to leave Mati."

A sudden flush spread over the piquant little face.

To leave Mati—and meet Jerry somewhere, to share the dangers with him ?

" Is that all ? " she asked, breathlessly.

Wang Tu Fu nodded again. " There is a sudden hurry. He is on his way out now," then, Oriental though he was, he seemed to get some inkling of her feelings. " He could not cable to you direct, and there was no time to write."

She sat down, resting her chin on her hand. The words had soothed her, if they had not satisfied her.

" You are giving the chiefs their money. Oh,

I know all the plans? There is plenty of money?"

The Chinaman became non-committal. "I am here on Sir Gerald Cardine's business. I have given you his message. Perhaps you could tell me how things are in Mati. He will be glad to know." The tone and words were formal, but the eyes behind the gold-rimmed glasses were kind.

Patsy laughed suddenly. "You're the still dear old Wang, who used to bring me sweets, years ago, when I was in short frocks. Don't be so stiff. I'd—I'd sooner die, than injure Jerry." The laugh changed into something very nearly akin to a sob—at any rate, she seemed to choke slightly.

"I want to see Abdulla. Have you heard of him lately?" the question came sharply. The Chinaman was going to trust her.

Her face cleared at once. "I know where he is," she pointed towards Mount Kini-Dah, the great extinct volcano, whose slopes came down almost to Sudang Bay itself. "He's there, with his band. He and Ismail have quarrelled again, and he won't pay tribute. Gunther is furious, and wants Ismail to attack him. Hajji Ali is with him."

"Good!" The banker took off his glasses, and wiped them carefully on one of the most perfect pieces of silk that ever came out of the Flowery Land. "Good. I will go up and see them."

The girl stared at him, wide-eyed with amazement. "But you can't! You know what Hajji Ali is. He'll hold you for ransom, and torture you. Jerry—Sir Gerald, I mean—would never expect you to take that risk."

"There is no risk," Wang Tu Fu smiled. "They know, these brigands of Katu, they know the vengeance of my people." For a moment his eyes flashed ominously. "That is where Ismail has made a mistake. Who is with you, on the launch?"

Patsy flushed, then looked away. "My father. We came round to arrange about some hemp; but he's—he's ill. I'm doing the business."

There was relief in the Chinaman's eyes, relief mingled with sympathy. He did not want Dennis Wrench to know of his doings, and so was glad to hear of his condition; but, from the depths of his heart, he pitied this brave little girl, who was wrestling with a drunken father.

Dennis Wrench was bad enough in Mati, even under Blackwood's eye; but he was impossible once he got away from the town, and could obtain liquor, usually native liquor.

"And in Mati? How are things in Mati?" Wang Tu Fu went back to his original question.

The girl was all eagerness, at once. "They know already, I'm sure they know Jerry is coming back. You can see it in the faces of Gunther and Darkin—the way they scowl at me. And Walter Blackwood knows. He's furious with Jerry,

says he himself is a business man, and wants no politics, yet, for all his business, he can't forget that he's an Englishman. And the younger men, like Jack Barham and Locock, they're always discussing together, how to help Jerry, I suppose."

"And the Raja?" Wang Tu Fu asked.

Patsy gave a little shudder. "Oh, how I hate him—and fear him. He watches me, always. I long for Jerry to come, and let us be safe. You don't hear anything when Jerry is about." She seemed to be speaking almost unconsciously, and quite as a child. "Ismail is always with Gunther and Darkin, and a German officer who has come out. They're putting up a new battery, to command the harbour mouth."

"German guns?" the Chinaman was treating her as an intellectual equal now.

"I think so. Jack—Mr. Bartram, said so. And they've got down some hillmen, deserters from Abdulla and Ali Hajji. It's—it's not too safe in Mati at present."

The banker rubbed his smooth chin reflectively. He had heard all he wanted to know. He was certain it was true, and he was quite able to fill in the blanks. Now, he became formal again.

"My principal, Sir Gerald Cardine, instructed me to tell you that there may be a crisis in Mati, shortly, and that all white women should leave at once. I was told to place this at your disposal," he handed her a bulky envelope. "If

you will check the contents, you will find they consist of notes for ten thousand dollars."

Now, she coloured furiously. "I can't take it. I can't take it from him—such a large sum. And I shall stay, to see it through."

But he pressed it on her. "Other white women may want help. And, if you stay, you will tie his hands completely."

In the end, she gave way. The same boat which carried her back to the launch took Wang Tu Fu ashore, unarmed, immaculately clad, bound for the camp of the two worst scoundrels in Katu.

When he returned, twenty-four hours later, his clothes were certainly soiled with mud, but his smile was bland as ever. Whilst the brigands who had accompanied him were counting the silver dollars, he had a bath and changed, and was out again in time to take their receipts.

"There will be five times that amount—when Sir Gerald Cardine is Raja of Katu," he remarked to the leader of the party, who had spent two years at Oxford, and three years in Singapore Gaol.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE VANITY OF REGRETS

Five men sat on the veranda of Wang Tu Fu's beautiful bungalow, and, with perfect calmness, discussed the details of a plan which was almost certain to result in the deaths of some, or all, of them, a plan which, moreover, would lead to the breaking of a large number of laws, both local and international.

Many more people, natives, were, of course, going to lose their lives over the adventure, but, as young Parke remarked incidentally, the supply of Malays always exceeded the demand; consequently, they could put that aspect of the question aside.

The five men were Sir Gerald Cardine, Wang Tu Fu, John Weste, Hubert Parke, and a black-bearded giant who had once commanded the "San José." After that disreputable little craft had completed its commission, and had been sold at a profit—Wang Tu Fu was a careful man always—James Hume, master-mariner, had been given the command of the auxiliary schooner "Zeta," and had forthwith made things hum.

He had a wide experience of crews, white and coloured, and a heavy fist ; moreover, the mate, whom he got, with some difficulty, out of a gambling shop, a small and energetic person named Prout, with one eye and two men's command of language, also knew his work. They had shipped a white crew, an all-British crew, greatly to the amazement of the waterside population, and, after redeeming the clothes and other belongings of that crew from the Teutonic and Chinese boarding house masters, and rendering that crew sober, by heterodox, though effective, methods, they had drilled and bullied it into shape in the space of forty-eight hours, their task being rendered easier by the fact that nearly half their men had received a most expensive training in the Royal Navy, and had been allowed to leave the Service just as they had reached real efficiency.

They sat close together, those five men, having secret matters to discuss. Gerald was the principal speaker. He was thinner than ever, though his face had a slightly swollen look, like the face of a man who had been drinking heavily, and, from time to time, he made unwonted nervous gestures with his hands. But his brain seemed quite clear, his determination as strong as ever, his judgment as sane.

Even the Chinaman, who had read the signs instantly, and knew that the other man was doomed, having the sense of opiates bred in him,

had no misgivings regarding the immediate future. Gerald Cardine had braced himself up to go through with his venture.

Now, also, he had the ways of a leader. The blood of the Cardines seemed to be running riot in his veins. All their genius, all their powers of organisation, all their grim courage, all their disregard of every consideration save the achieving of their end, seemed to be concentrated in him. It was as though he wished the family, of which he was virtually the last—there remained but the feeble, half-witted son of an immoral woman, his half-brother—he wished, intended, that family to end as it had lived, splendidly, patriotically, to go out in a blaze of glory.

The Darkins and the Lechers, and all the other "poor little street bred people," would call that glory "crime," but there were still enough Englishmen left to understand, and be better and prouder men because of what one of their own class had done.

"I shall make my base camp on the slope of Kini-Dah," Gerald spoke slowly. "Long ago, I picked on the place. It is an ideal natural fort. Even if they scaled the mountain, they could not attack us from above, and, in front, our Maxims alone would protect us. Then, when I have got Abdulla's men and the rest armed properly, I am going to march on Mati, coming down from the hills behind, whilst you, Captain Hume, will land another party on the North Point."

The sailor nodded. "They've got a new battery in now."

"I know." Gerald's reply came sharply. "And they've got some Germans to serve the guns. Your business will be not to give them a chance to sink you."

John Weste rubbed his chin reflectively. "Wouldn't it have been possible to start directly on Mati?"

The leader faced round. "How? It would have needed a small fleet of transports to land our men, perhaps under a heavy fire. The Palace and the Club alone would be sufficient as forts. . . . No, my plan is the only one possible—to use the hillmen to help me to seize the island, and then to keep them in hand, until the British Government comes along and takes it over."

"And if your Government does not 'come along?'" the Chinaman asked.

Gerald Cardine's eyes flashed. "Then I shall hang on as long as possible, to the end."

So far, Captain Hume had been little more than a listener; now he asked a question, rather anxiously it seemed. "And Ismail, and his hangers-on—are they to be made prisoners-of-war?"

The answer seemed to satisfy him. "Ismail has white women in his seraglio; Carl Gunther and Darkin know how he procured them. Any one who brings me unnecessary prisoners will

have to provide for their keep out of his own pocket."

Wang Tu Fu rubbed his hands together gently. Yes, this was a man who understood the East and its ways. Young Parke, never having seen a massacre in the East, a wholesale killing of men, laughed, finding something humorous in his chief's words; but John Weste frowned. He was keen as ever on the adventure, but such wholly Elizabethan methods did not make good copy; you dare not publish the story of them. Moreover, he had been bred up in the traditions of Law and Order, and, during the last twenty-four hours, the wealth and dignity of Singapore had served to bring home to him, vividly, that, even in those waters, you were still in the grip of the Law. He was beginning to be a little uneasy. Until now, he had not realized fully the fifteenth century strain in this twentieth century Cardine.

"Wouldn't that be going a little far?" he protested.

Gerald turned on him sharply. "I have made my plans," he answered, in a manner which seemed to render further argument useless. Weste, remembering the methods of old Sir Charles, merely shrugged his shoulders slightly. It was quite useless to try and convince a Cardine that he was wrong.

"He fined me, that bounder Ismail did; and it was Gunther who put him up to it." Captain Hume breathed heavily. "I don't like niggers

of any sort. No, I don't like them," he sighed again. "A nigger—at least, he was a half-breed called 'Smuts,' landed me in trouble in Capetown. . . . I quite agree with you, Sir Gerald. I, for one, am not going to pay for the keep of Ismail or Gunther. But I've nothing against Darkin."

Always, when that name was mentioned, an ugly look came into Gerald's eyes. He had never forgotten those words concerning Margaret's past. Now, however, all he said was,

"Mr. Albert Darkin can safely be left to me."

Once more John Weste shrugged his shoulders. He had met some strange people in the course of his career, but never before had he come across any one who calmly proposed to put to death the brother of a British Cabinet Minister. Yet, "One of the Good Darkins Hanged!" What a splendid headline that would make! And if he could get photographs as well! After a while, in thinking of the "scoop," he became almost reconciled to the other aspects of the case.

Then, suddenly, he sat up. That old story, the scandal which had been the indirect cause of the fall of the Ministry in which Sir Charles had served! Darkin and Lady Cardine! Gloag had warned him never to refer to it. Gloag had declared that the new baronet did not know, but —this looked as though Gloag had been wrong.

Darkin and Lady Cardine—Joseph Darkin, not Albert! If Gerald hanged Albert, the whole

world would howl at what would inevitably seem to be brutal, vicarious revenge. He had already grown to worship his leader, and, at all costs, this thing must be stopped. Still, there would be time enough for that. He shrank from doing anything now.

" Miss Wrench said they would leave in time, at the first alarm. I suggested they should go now, but she said it would look suspicious." It was the Chinaman speaking. " She is very brave. I have known her since a child. Very brave indeed. It will be all right," and he beamed behind his glasses, apparently at the thought of Patsy.

But Gerald was not so entirely satisfied. " They ought to have left—Patsy and Alice Blackwood. As for the Darkin woman, she and Mrs. Earwaker can herd with their kind. But I told Jack Bartram what to do, the fool," and he flung his cigar end viciously into the bushes.

Wang Tu Fu laughed. " Miss Wrench is not —not too easy to persuade."

" I know that," Gerald answered curtly. He was thinking now of the letter he had received from Patsy just before he left London. Since leaving Mati, he had merely sent her a couple of short notes, more or less perfunctory in character, quite different from those he had been wont to write to her in the old days, when she had still seemed a child to him.

It was not that he cared for her less, but that

he cared for Margaret so infinitely more. He knew, now, that, even had there not been the curse of the morphia, and had the one woman not appeared on the scene, he could never have loved Patsy really, as a wife. He would have fought his hardest to make her happy, but there must have been lacking the essential, or one of the essentials, of married life—Passion.

We may revel in cant on this question of marriage—we usually do, at least most of us do, and earn glory in suburban circles thereby, even if we fail to acquire merit in the eyes of the Gods. We may take the Victorian view, that marriage is a contract, a business contract slavered over with sentiment, that one marries discreetly, to better one's position, that Love is very nearly indecent, and that Sex is wholly so, that the dear Vicar of our grotesquely hideous modern church, with its sprawling texts and its ghastly stained glass, its large brass vulture with an unnecessarily huge Bible on its back, and its shoddy German brass candlesticks, that the dear Vicar is right, when he hints, delicately, of course, that the Almighty should be reprimanded for having introduced sexual relations into polite society. To put the question on the lowest ground, the idea is upsetting to young curates. Those nameless old scholars, who wrote the perfect English of the Marriage Service, and put the whole matter so clearly, would never have been admitted to the drawing-room of the Vicarage.

Or we may take the soulful view, and prate of love in the Abstract, of Affinities, of Beauty of Soul, of any other phrase which suggests physical flabbiness combined with mental unhealthiness, an inability to realise Physical Beauty, a negation of all that is perfect in nature by being satisfied with Nature's imperfect products.

But Real Love—the Love that lasts—consists of the two desires—the desire to make the loved one happy, to serve her, to lay the whole world at her feet, and the desire for the body, to own it, to guard it, to treasure it as one's most sacred possession, and yet to be sure, always, that no one else knows how great a treasure it is.

The first desire remains, or should remain, unaltered through the years, and it should be so with the second; for, though the years must bring physical changes, the mental part, the sense of possession, remains. The memories of past joys are always there, and the deep contentment which those memories bring.

Gerald Cardine knew now that, as regarded Patsy Wrench, there had never been the second desire. She had been his chum, his dear little comrade, but never once had he looked on her with the light of sex in his eyes. He might have made her happy; he would have striven his very hardest to do so, being an English gentleman; but, at the back of his mind, would always have been, and must always have been, the feeling that he, himself, had missed the Great Joy of Life.

The world had altered for him when he met Margaret. So few hours had elapsed between the moment when he first met her, and when he stood by her side, as chief mourner, at her husband's funeral, that he had not really suffered the fiercest agony of renunciation, the knowledge that, because you love a woman, and because she is your friend's wife, you must go away, finally, altogether.

He had known of the other agony before—the realisation of his own doom. In her divine pity, she had tried to give him hope—for himself; but that hope had died quickly. He belonged to the Demon of the Poppy Heads, and he had no right to love any woman, or to try to win any woman's love.

Her very sympathy, the unintentional revelation of her capacity for love, had made it infinitely harder. She was Sir Charles Cardine's wife; but whatever might have been, she had been wife in name only for some time,

She was made for love. Her cleft chin, the redness of her lips, the strange, elusive shadow in her grey eyes, the curves of her body—all these told him that. And, somehow, although he had so little to give her, something told him that she could have loved him.

Night after night, since that day off Sudang Heads, he had lain awake, thinking, longing, cursing his fate.

Her dear body! There would be a perfume

all her own, a whiteness such as none other had, a thrill in the very touching of her. She would be dainty in all things—lace, and the finest of linen. . . . And only the firelight in the room.

Yet he had to go to his death. Whatever else happened, whether he won or lost in his attempt to seize Katu, he did not mean to leave the island alive. Anyway, the Demon of the Poppy Heads would allow him very little time, and he had no intention of going through the period of lunacy, which, in most cases like his, precedes death.

He was going to die for the Empire, die gloriously, like a Cardine! He could have laughed aloud at the notion, and the bitterness in his laugh would have made his companions start to their feet in horror.

For the Empire! That had once been his idea. Now, he had come down to earth, had become a normal man, not a Cardine, had become one of the crowd, and he knew that he was really going to his death because life without Margaret had become insupportable.

For the Empire! The Empire was merely an afterthought now, part of the game. At last, he saw that clearly. The woman, the one woman, in whose company he had not spent a dozen hours, dwarfed all else.

He loved her so greatly that he was going to die in a way she would admire—that, he told himself, was really the extent of his patriotism, that was why he was able, calmly and deliber-

ately, with what would have been the highest self-sacrifice in another man, to go to his death.

She should always think well of him.

And then, suddenly, his mood changed. He pictured her in another man's arms, another man knowing, being sure of, the things which he, himself, had only pictured. And he would be dead, a mere vague memory to her. There was madness in the thought.

Parke's voice recalled him. Whilst Gerald had been sitting there, wrestling with devils of his own creating, a boy had brought along a Singapore afternoon paper.

"Listen to this," Parke was saying. "It's the Honours List! Honours! They ought to get a new word. Joseph Darkin, recently appointed Colonial Secretary, becomes a K.C.M.G. Sir Joseph Darkin, companion of St. Michael and St. George! I wonder what those two would say if they could be asked about it. Joe Darkin, one of the Good Darkins, the Apostles of Peace, and non-resistance to foreigners, being pally with the militant Saints! Oh, my aunt! Won't the chapels hum!"

John Weste turned on him in sudden anger. "For God's sake, shut up," he growled. "We're all sick of Darkins."

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE MISSION OF THE "ZETA"

THE Governor of the Straits Settlements was himself a member of a great English family; therefore, he was fully aware of the status of the man for whom he had sent. Also, having an unpleasant and uncongenial task to perform he was ill at ease.

"I have—er—er—Sir Gerald Cardine," he began, "I have received instructions from the Colonial Office to the effect that you contemplate a raid on the territories of the Raja of Katu, and that I am to warn you of the consequences of doing so. The Secretary of State for the Colonies goes on to state—but it doesn't matter about that rubbish." His official manner seemed to collapse. "You're warned now, don't you know, Sir Gerald."

The latter smiled. He knew the other well, by reputation.

"I am quite ready to assume the Darkin message, Sir William," he answered. "It wouldn't make any difference, anyway."

His Excellency snorted. "He's an insulting hog. But I have to do these things, officially. Also, officially, I ought to hold up your vessel. How soon can you get away from here?"

"To-night—if no one watches us transferring the last of the guns and ammunition," Gerald answered promptly.

Sir William held out his hand. "Good! No one will watch you. . . . Good-bye, and good luck, Cardine. It's the great game you're playing. . . . By the way, there's a steamer load of Squareheads going to Mati. I'll hold them up all I can, in spite of orders from Downing Street to give them every facility. . . . . If you come back here as a Raja, you shall have a royal salute—and to hell with all traitors."

Captain Hume was ready to hustle things, and Wang Tu Fu knew exactly how to put the machinery of hustling in motion. It was obvious, too, that His Excellency had acted promptly, for no one asked questions regarding the cases being transferred from the cargo steamer to the "Zeta."

The job was almost finished when young Parke came hurrying down, evidently big with news.

"I say, Sir Gerald," he exclaimed, "I just came across that bounder, Reggie Burnham. I had gone into a bar to get a drink, and there he was, with a couple of Germans—officers by

the cut of them. He was talking very loud, and they were trying to stop him."

Gerald frowned. Really, the man's business in Singapore seemed to make little difference; and he suspected that his plans would have become known, or would have been guessed at, even without Burnham's breach of confidence; but he hated to think of any one connected with his stepmother being on his track. Nothing but sorrow and trouble had ever come to him through that woman.

Still, there was nothing to be done, and, of course, there was the chance that the little man's presence in Singapore was in no way connected with himself.

That night, Gerald Cardine was in no mood for talking to his companions. As soon as the "Zeta" was clear of the harbour, he went down to his own cabin, shut the door, threw himself into a chair, and then sat very still, apparently deep in thought. From time to time, he glanced at the clock on the rack, with a kind of hungry longing in his eyes, and, with every minute, that longing seemed to grow. That horrible, unspeakable tingling was in his nerves, yet, not until the hour, would he take a morphia pill.

Ever since he received Margaret's note—it was always in his pocket—he had been going through this same struggle. He was no more hopeful than before of saving himself, of curing

himself; he still saw only death ahead; but he was determined now to stick to the letter of his promise, and not increase the doses. And he had succeeded, at a terrible cost, a cost which can be understood only by those who have been through the agony themselves.

He had not increased the doses—in fact, though he had not realised it yet, he was taking less than had been the case in London, because there were now none of those odd special pills taken to meet some special strain. In spite of all the misery it entailed, all the temptation to secure relief in the easy way, he kept rigidly to his schedule.

Margaret had trusted to his honour.

Another man—who was not of the class of the Cardines—might have dwelt on the fact that she had backed her faith with half-a-million sterling; but with Gerald that was a minor consideration. All the Cardines had been ready to pour out their money in the public service, to make up for official meannesses or shortcomings. The great consideration was that the woman he loved believed in him. He was doomed, he would never see her again, even if he came out of Katu alive: and she might never know that he had kept faith; but, when he died, his own conscience should be clear on that point.

At last, the hands of the clock pointed to the hour. He got off the settee, and, with trembling

fingers, took one of those tiny white pills out of the box, mixed himself a whisky and soda, then sat down again.

But he did not take the pill at once. He was deadly white, and, several times, he coughed, as though about to be sick ; but, though the pill would give him almost instant relief, he was going to try and hold out a little longer.

When he did take it, a momentary glance of satisfaction flitted across that drawn, weary face

" I've gained twenty minutes, actually twenty minutes," he muttered.

A quarter of an hour later, he was on deck again, alert, masterful, essentially the Commander-in-Chief.

Young Parke was on the poop with the skipper. Gerald beckoned to him.

" Did the Chinaman give you any message about the Englishwomen in Mati ? " he asked.

The other coloured. " Oh, I say, I am sorry. I was thinking of that bounder, Burnham, and forgot. There's a letter here. It came up on a little trading steamer, Wang said."

Gerald frowned. He had engaged the youngster—who had left the Service for financial reasons—because of some fine work he had done with native levies in Somaliland ; but he had already regretted his choice bitterly. Parke was a delightful companion, and his courage was beyond question ; but his slackness in other

things totally unfitted him for the post of chief-of-staff. Still, there had been neither the time nor the opportunity to secure anyone else.

The letter was from Patsy. Gerald knew the handwriting instantly, and, as was always the case when he saw it, he was conscious of a vague sense of self-reproach. There was the feeling that he had not played the game with his little chum of the old days. He went into the chart-room, and read it by the rather dim light of the swinging lamp.

"Dear Jerry," it ran. "Please don't be cross with me because we have not taken advantage of your generosity and left Mati. There have been so many difficulties, and then, too, it would seem like running away. To begin with, there is Walter Blackwood. He is furious with you, because you are 'upsetting business.' It seems nothing to him who has the island, as long as he makes money. And yet he is not a Little Englander at heart. Of course, I think he is a little jealous to find that you are really a great man, the Head of the Cardines; because when he is tired and cross, he talks about the middle-class English business man being the backbone of the Empire. I got so angry one day that I told him the Empire wasn't a hunchback."

Gerald smiled grimly; put the letter down whilst he lit a fresh cigar; then went on with his reading.

"Alice Blackwood, of course, won't do any-

thing without his sanction, and I simply couldn't leave her behind. Walter says you will never even be allowed to leave Singapore, and that, if you do get away, you will fail at the very start, and probably be killed. Father agrees with him. To my intense disgust, my very intense disgust, they are quite friendly with the Germans. It is business, business, all the time. They can't bear the idea of the upset you are causing; and they can't understand your motives. Walter says it is self-advertisement. . . . You! Of all men!

"He actually had Gunther and Darkin to dinner a few nights ago—to show there was no ill-will!

"'We shall never go to war with Germany. It's unthinkable. The two countries have too many business interests in common,' he said at table—you know his dogmatic way.

"Then Gunther grinned. 'You English business men have no sentiment, hey? You believe not in the nonsense of Big Ideals?'

"Of course, he was pulling Walter's leg, for, like all Germans, he works for Germany's World-Empire—isn't that the phrase?—but poor little City-bred Walter was quite flattered. He began to talk loudly about international commerce.

"I simply had to cut in. 'It's to help on that commerce that Germany's racing us in building battleships, isn't it?' I asked.

"They were very mad, all of them, except Alice.

Darkin and Gunther looked at one another, and the Good One said something about the need for keeping little girls quiet. Gunther grinned.

"'I fear you have learned much foolishness from your friend, Mr. Raithe—Sir Gerald Cardine, I should say,' he purred.

"Then Darkin laughed—you know that nasty half-drunken, teetotaller's laugh of his. 'Cardine!' he echoed, 'Oh, yes, there's Margaret Cardine, too, "Lady" Cardine,' and he began some horrible story about her.

"I didn't care for anything or anyone, Jerry. I left the table. When I saw Walter later, I *did* go for him, for allowing it. I'm sure that, at heart, he was ashamed; but all he could do was to mutter that 'it didn't pay to quarrel.'"

Probably, Walter Blackwood, correct, suburban souled little business man, whose books had always balanced to the farthing, who had never in his life broken the letter of one of the Ten Commandments—he could have recited them right off, and considered them just as sacred as his faith in the invincibility of British Arms and the Beauties of the Albert Memorial—little Walter Blackwood would have been greatly surprised could he have realised that, despite all his virtues, he had suddenly been wiped off the list of those who were to be saved in Mati; that, because he had allowed a certain conversation at his dinner-table, this hard-faced, grey-haired young Cardine of Cardine Place was going to

allow a savage to kill him with a kris. But then—the Suburbs and the City—they are much the same thing—do not understand the Cardine Way.

You cannot put the value of Cardines and their kind down on a balance-sheet. A Cecil John Rhodes is merely a crude financial proposition, a quotation on the Stock Exchange, and it pays to boom him; but that John Mackenzie, who made Rhodes' work possible, whose thunder Rhodes stole, the greatest, noblest British statesman who ever set foot in South Africa, is practically forgotten . . . He never floated a company.

There had been a Cardine with John Mackenzie when the old Scotch hero pulled down the Boer flag at Vryburg, and that same Cardine had quarrelled savagely with Rhodes when the latter handed back that flag, and had the Union Jack hauled down. Rhodes had no more understood his views than Blackwood understood those of Sir Gerald Cardine. They were not business. You could not state them in terms of pounds, shillings, and pence.

"The younger men at the Club," Patsy went on, "are all on your side, of course. There have been a lot of quarrels over it already, and one or two of the English and Americans have said, openly, that, if you land here, they will join you. Mr. Bartram is especially outspoken, and there is quite war already between him and the Germans. He is very, very brave.

"The Raja is more horrid than ever. I hate to go out, because of the way he looks at one," Gerald's hand closed convulsively, the nails almost cutting into the skin. "Darkin is always with him, and leers at me, too. I'm sure they think I know all about your plans. I wish I know whether they took you seriously or not. They believe you have no money behind you, and say you can do nothing with Abdulla and the other chiefs without it. On the other hand, there is a rumour of a lot of Germans coming out to help Ismail.

"Lady Cardine sent me such a lovely present the other day, but she did not write with it, or send me any address."

There was a postscript across the corner, "I suppose I ought to address you as 'Dear Sir Gerald,' but I always think of you as 'Jerry.'"

Gerald sighed as he folded up the letter. Difficulties seemed to accumulate so fast. It was bad enough to have his plans known, to have the disapproval of the British Government, the hostility of the German; but, in some ways, it was almost worse to know that the English women were remaining in Mati. It tied his hands so greatly so far as an attack on that town was concerned. For a moment, he felt furious with Patsy; then his face softened. Of course, she was only standing by her friends and her father.

He must take some fresh precautions, that

was all, alter some of his plans. What matter? It was a losing game. If only he had received Margaret's money in time, so that he could have organised things properly, instead of doing them in this amateur way!

## CHAPTER XX

### RAJA CARDINE

"THE finest harbour in the Far East, Sir Gerald, one of the finest harbours in the world," Captain Hume glanced appreciatively round Sudang Bay, broke off to say something which was not appreciative to the man at the wheel, then went on, "It beats Singapore hollow, and it's every bit as much on the main track. I guess it's worth while, this raid of yours. Kind of reminds me of that old shellback with the drum—what's his name?—oh, Francis Drake."

Gerald Cardine was busy with his own thoughts, but he could not forbear a smile. The "shellback" beside him, huge, hideous, utterly without the sense of fear, would have agreed most excellently with the Elizabethan hero. Were they not all Elizabethan, he asked himself, all, with the exception of John Weste, who was in the chart-house, scribbling "copy"? If you had told him that he, himself, was really Fifteenth Century, he would probably have been surprised, and, perhaps, indignant. The Fifteenth Cen-

tury sounds so crude, even when you dilute it with the pseudo-culture of the Twentieth.

The whole ship's company had mustered, bare-headed, and the ship's guns—the seven-pounder aft, and the two one-pounders forward—had thundered out a salute as the " Zeta " had passed over the spot where Sir Charles Cardine had been buried ; but now this new Cardine of Cardine Place found himself resenting the fact that his great predecessor had not been spared to see the harbour. How the old statesman's eyes would have gleamed.

Fate had indeed dealt hardly with them. Had Sir Charles lived another day, all his vast experience, all the political wisdom garnered in a life-time, would have been placed at Gerald's disposal, and, in all probability, an ample sum of money as well. His brows contracted slightly as he thought of the last. It was sweeter, far sweeter, to have received it from Margaret.

Captain Hume's voice broke in on his thoughts.

" You know that kind of belfry in the Square at Mati ; Sir Gerald," it said. " I've been thinking it would be a fine place to hang Ismail and Carl Gunther—there's plenty of room for the audience."

Gerald smiled, but made no sort of answer. He knew his man now, knew that when, as at the present moment, he was wholly occupied with some matter of navigation, he had a way of firing out those apparently irrelevant remarks, of stating

things which, for a long time past, had been at the back of his mind.

The sails were furled, and they were running now, with the auxiliary screw, across the huge, land-locked harbour. John Weste and Parke, standing together at the break of the poop, had little to say to one another. Now that they had seen Sudang Bay, they realised that their leader was a great man—and a great Englishman.

Germany wanted Katu, because Katu would be a colony, and because the possession of it would please the Colonial Party; but Gerald Cardine wanted it because Sudang Harbour was one of the keys of the East.

For the two men, the affair had taken on a new gravity. Hitherto, to Weste it had been "splendid copy," to Parke it had been a "fine game"; but the realisation of what Sudang meant had sobered them. They felt that they were face to face with an Imperial Duty.

As they drew near the shore—there was a nipa-thatched native village where, in days to come, the great dock-sheds would arise—they saw a number of men, clad in white, stroll down through the palm grove, and cluster together on the beach. Gerald Cardine surveyed them through his glasses.

"Abdulla's gang," he said. "Yes, there's the old scoundrel himself. He's certainly one of the most unholy blackguards in the Malay Archipelago, but he suits my purpose. He will help me to

smash Ismail, whom he hates, and then, I suppose, I shall have to smash him. Meantime, he wants my dollars, and my guns."

John Weste knit his brows. Bohemian though he called himself, he had an innate sense of Victorian respectability. Really, he seemed to have inherited nothing from his forbears of the Elizabethan Age, whilst his fifteenth century ancestors would have shocked him.

" It's a pity you have to work with such tools, Sir Gerald," he said, a little stiffly.

Gerald Cardine swung round quickly. He was not in the mood to brook criticism or opposition. " I thought you understood," he retorted. " It is still open to you not to land with me. You can remain aboard the ' Zeta,' and write up your story from the reports I send."

The journalist flushed. He had not expected to have the thing put so crudely, and he was savage with himself for what he had said. So he apologised.

" I didn't mean to cry off," he added. " I want to go through with you—to victory."

Gerald gave him one of his rare smiles. " I know you will both stand by me. . . . That is where I am going to make my base camp," he pointed to a spot some five hundred feet up the mountain side. " You can see what looks like a ledge ? Really, there's a series of huge caves, and the space outside them is not commanded either from above or from the sides. As for a

frontal attack, you can see how much chance anyone would have. There's plenty of good water, and, if Abdulla has played the game, plenty of food stored in the caves."

Just before the "Zeta" came to an anchor, Gerald Cardine went down to his cabin. During the last forty-eight hours, by holding on until the very last moment, he had actually saved two morphia pills, a half grain in two days, a very small matter to the man who does not know, a veritable triumph to the man who knows. Now, though it was well before the schedule time, he was going to take one, to brace himself up to meet these semi-savage mercenaries of his. He was sure that Margaret would understand—and forgive.

He knew the necessity of making an impression on his future followers, and he landed in state, as the new Raja, with an armed, uniformed boat's crew. He looked the part, too. Clad all in white, with a white helmet, weaponless, as became a man with a bodyguard, he made a fine, commanding figure, one of those which appeal, instinctively, to the Asiatic mind.

The little crowd of Malays on the beach was obviously impressed, whilst even Abdulla, a wizened, evil-faced old man, seemed unusually nervous as he saluted the new-comer.

Gerald returned the salutes gravely, then he and his two white companions walked with Abdulla up to the principal house in the village.

The leader himself never looked either to right or left, but went on, side by side with the old native chieftain, stalking along as though danger were non-existent. But his two fellow-countrymen could not help glancing round at the rapidly-growing crowd of natives, almost all of whom were obviously fighting men.

"A choice lot, a very choice lot," Herbert Parke muttered. "No doubt, so long as they remain on our side, they will be ready to murder every one else. But what guarantee is there of their loyalty?"

Weste nodded in the direction of the "Zeta." "I understand that our good friend, Wang Tu Fu, only paid them one-third on account," he said. "There is a little more on board our 'navy,' and the balance is in Singapore. So they will probably behave themselves."

"Perhaps," the youngster looked a little doubtful. "They're a tough crowd. I wonder if the Raja—the rival Raja, I mean—can muster as many bad-looking cut-throats."

The journalist laughed, rather mirthlessly. "Time will show us that. At the present moment we will content ourselves with watching the proclamation of the new White Raja of Katu."

That ceremony did not take very long. Every native present was in the secret, and there was no time to waste on mere forms. Most of them had heard of the other white Raja in the neighbouring island of Borneo, of Raja Brooke, who

had done such great things for the people ; and, though there were very few present to whom the state of peace enforced by Raja Brooke would have been congenial, they were ready to approve of it in theory—especially as it must be preceded by a state of war.

Abdulla's men in white had now been joined by men in blue jean, the followers of Ali Hajji, and that pious person himself—had he not been to Mecca ?—was on the veranda beside Gerald when old Abdulla made his speech.

Five hundred throats grunted approval at the list of Gerald's proposed reforms ; but the grunts became shouts when the old chieftain went on to speak of the forthcoming capture of Mati, and of the loot to be obtained there. Loot is a tangible thing in the Far East ; reforms are mere words.

Ali Hajji, a cunning-faced man of about forty, followed Abdulla. Himself the greatest rogue, the most heartless brigand, in Katu, he dwelt on the sins of Raja Ismail, his indulgence in alcohol, contrary to the Law of the Prophet of God, the unjust taxes he levied, his numerous petty oppressions. Ismail must go, he declared, turning his eyes upwards, and the man to turn Ismail out was undoubtedly this new white Raja. Also, had not the latter plenty of money wherewith to reward his faithful followers ?

Then Gerald spoke, very briefly. He had only to confirm the promises already made on his behalf.

His reception was distinctly favourable, and there was something very nearly akin to enthusiasm when he promised his new followers modern rifles and plenty of ammunition ; but at the back of it all was that apathy of the East, the feeling that a change of rulers merely means a change of tyrants ; and amongst the five hundred or so natives present there were a good many who felt that they would greatly have preferred a tyrant who was of their own colour, and was also a True Believer.

Still, for good or evil, the reign of Raja Cardine had begun in Katu.

## CHAPTER XXI

### FROM THE DIARY OF JOHN WESTE

Sir Gerald Cardine—I cannot, somehow, think of him as Raja Cardine—is a wonderful man. No one else I ever met could get through the same amount of work in the same time. True, so far as the landing of the "Zeta's" cargo is concerned, he has two able assistants in Captain Hume and Prout, the mate; but he is the main driving force.

All the war material is ashore now, and Parke is sweltering in the job of fixing up the base camp. Six hundred brigands have already been made happy with the gifts of modern rifles and ammunition, and there are four hundred rifles still to be given out.

With a thousand men—I have not yet learnt the local term for a warrior—we can sweep Katu, provided always that the thousand remain loyal to us.

They are an unholy crowd. Already, three of them have tried their rifles on their fellows, and are now themselves hanging from the branches of

a tree about four hundred yards away. Raja Cardine's justice is swift. I believe he would not hesitate to hang even Ali Hajji himself if he thought it expedient.

Parke has two seven-pounders and two maxims up at the base camp—Fort Cardine, he calls it. We have two mountain guns, and two of those light "galloping Maxims" to take with us when we attack Mati.

So far, our men are well in hand. Cardine—the Chief, we usually call him—sent all his white sailors back aboard the "Zeta," and has now a personal guard of twenty of Abdulla's scoundrels and twenty of Ali Hajji's. Armed with kris and rifle, with bandoliers usually over the wrong shoulder, they have some kind of military appearance, and they are beginning to learn that, whilst on sentry-go, they must hide their cigars at the approach of an officer.

Certainly, every native fears the Chief. I don't know what there is about the man, but he has inherited, or developed, some strange quality of command. I should imagine that he had changed greatly from what he used to be in the days when he was a trader at Mati. Men who knew him then have told me that he was genial and easy-going—a "good fellow." Now, he is courteous, thoughtful for others, a man to love and to follow, but not a man you can approach. He has his bad fits—and they are bad—fits of the most intense depression, when it is almost impossible

to get him to answer you. True, they pass off quickly, but whilst they are on he is like a Soul in Hell. I wonder if it is—But, no, that seems unthinkable. His brain is too clear, his will power too great for such an explanation.

As I said, these Malays fear him, and, what is more, respect him. I believe that, so long as he was present, he would hold any force together. He is a strong man, and the Asiatic worships a master. Even Abdulla and Ali Hajji, hardened criminals though they are, are afraid of him.

Messengers are constantly passing between this camp and small chieftains in other parts of the island. So far as I can gather, Cardine has bought up most of the heads of the mountain clans, who hate Raja Ismail, because Carl Gunther has made him tax them, and who welcome the idea of anything in the nature of a war, especially when they are being paid for their services.

It is only twenty miles from here to Mati, across country, twenty miles of alternate rock and mud, bog or mountain-spur; yet, though we have been here two days, Ismail and his advisers do not know of our arrival. The Chief told me so, only an hour ago, told me in the most casual way. There are, it seems, only two roads leading into the town from the interior, and the very day we landed, he sent parties to watch these, and deal with any messengers. There are no

footpaths, he says, no possibility of getting through, save by those roads.

His own spies have been into Mati—one returned this morning—and they report that preparations are being made against an attack from the sea. Strange that they should never have suspected his plan! It is so obviously the right one.

He says he has sent no message to any of the British in Mati, not even to Miss Wrench. It sounds pretty callous, but I can understand his idea. The secret would be bound to leak out. Then, too, he is very anxious for none of the Europeans to take part in the revolution. He is here, not as an Englishman, a British subject, but as the new Raja of Katu, who is going to oust Raja Ismail. I doubt if he can keep up the rôle, but it is worth trying. It makes things simpler, because, at any rate at the outset, the business is merely a local disturbance, and not an international affair.

Ismail, we hear, can muster some three hundred native soldiers—brigands, like ours—in the town itself. Then he has twenty white residents on whom he can rely, more or less, and fifty Germans, who have been hurried through via Singapore. The Chief's face grew very grim when he told me that they had been accompanied by the redoubtable Reggie Burnham. That little man would have been wiser to have kept out of Sir Gerald Cardine's reach.

They have guns and ammunition in plenty, but the guns are placed with a view to an attack from the sea; and, if we make a surprise attack from the land side, there will not be much chance to use them.

The Palace, they say, will be the toughest proposition, though, if necessary, the chief means to use his mountain guns on this. He is quite ruthless, in many ways. I believe he does not mind how many lives, including his own, are lost over this business, provided the Empire gets Katu in the end.

I wish I could learn what is his real attitude towards the Darkins. It's a minor point, of course, but it counts. I am sure he is in love with Lady Cardine—the mere mention of her name brings a flush to his face—but I am by no means sure that he knows the old story. His animosity against the local Darkin seems more in the nature of a personal quarrel.

Whatever happens, he must not hang this Albert Darkin. It would alienate all public sympathy at home, and would absolutely ruin Lady Cardine's name. At present, she seems to have lived down the scandal, or, rather, the slander.

Parke's fort will be almost impregnable. The selection of the place is another proof of Cardine's genius. The ledge really seems to hang in mid-air, high up the mountain-side, and nothing short of very carefully timed shrapnel from a ship could affect the defenders.

Of course, if we are successful in the attack on Mati, the town itself will become our base, but "Fort Cardine" will remain invaluable, as giving us a hold on the northern portion of the island, and control of Sudang Bay.

So far as I can make out, no Raja has yet had complete power over the whole of Katu. The smaller chieftains have acknowledged him grudgingly, yielded to superior force; the brigands, like Ali Hajji's, have defied him openly. At the present time, we don't know what support Ismail will have in the interior, though, apparently, our two main allies, Abdulla and Ali Hajji, have a host of personal foes, who will certainly fight against them.

The most important thing seems to be to get possession of Ismail himself. It would be little short of a disaster if he escaped from Mati, and started fighting us in the hills. If our men were reliable, it would be a different matter; but I strongly suspect both Abdulla and the Hajji of designs to oust Cardine in the end.

We are indeed playing with fire.

What a mad enterprise it must seem to people at Home, or would seem, if from the security of their office chairs, they could see it in its actuality.

Battle, murder, and sudden death—they would understand the real meaning of those words. And they would shudder at the risks we are taking.

I, for one, should shudder—in fact, I do shudder occasionally now.

The Pale Horse and His Rider seem always circling round the outskirts of the camp, waiting to accompany us when we march out.

Madness? Of course it is. I tell myself so every time I try, metaphorically, to seat myself in an office chair in Fleet Street, and size it all up.

Yet, when I open my eyes again and look round, it seems quite natural. The setting suits it all so well. One expects sudden death amidst such scenery, and the murderers seem not in the least out of place.

I am out of place, though, because I find I value my skin; Parke, with his superabundant energy, toiling at the building of his fort, toiling in the blazing sunlight, is out of place; but Sir Gerald Cardine is not, cool, masterful, slow-moving, never doing a single thing with his own hands, he suits the East to perfection. Given loyal followers, or the means of enforcing loyalty, there is nothing he could not do in the East. Even as it is, he has done a marvellous thing in getting this force together, single-handed, and keeping the savages in order.

How long will it last though, once he is busy with other matters? It is easy to arm a rabble like this, quite another thing to disarm and disband it.

When I put the question to him, he raised his

eyebrows. "My dear Weste," he answered, "that will be the affair of the British Government, after I have handed Katu over to them. Perhaps they will send Mr. Lecher out as Commissioner, to put things right, and patch up peace between Abdulla and the other scoundrel, and persuade them not to use their new rifles on each other."

I said that Parke and myself were out of place in the drama, as our big sailorman, Captain Hume, would be; but the drama, the plot, is in perfect keeping with the scenery and the general atmosphere.

We are camped in the big clearing round the native village, within a hundred yards of high water mark. Between us and the perfectly-white beach, is a cocoa-nut grove, little more than a fringe of trees, through which we have a wonderful view of this most wonderful of natural harbours. On the other side, is the jungle, dense, forbidding, seemingly pregnant with every possibility of evil, a place of mystery and unknown perils. Above us, towers the great peak of Kini-Dah, a slumbering giant. They say that the fire in him is dead, that, never again, will the lava scar the hillside; but to me he, too, seems ominous, pregnant with danger and desolation.

The handful of local natives, mere fisher-folk, watch us with ill-concealed fear in their eyes. To have Ali Hajji amongst them—to mention one man only—is like having a tiger loose in their

midst. Even the hideous water-buffalo, wallowing in the mud at the southern end of the clearing, seems to have been terrified into a kind of surly civility towards mankind, never having seen so many men before.

Yes, the setting suits the plot. The waves lap so lightly on the white sand that their murmur really becomes part of the deadly stillness of the night. Instinctively, one listens for shrieks to come from the jungle. Only some ghastly tragedy could break that silence.

And, already, the air seems heavy with tragedy.

*Later.*

We are to march to-night, and attack Mati at daybreak. The Chief has just given me my orders. He is unusually cheerful or alert, although the news he has received might well have disconcerted him.

They know about us in Mati. Of course, it was inevitable that they should do so soon, just as it was impossible for us to have made a start from here earlier. I don't think that the Chief ever really expected to take them by surprise in the end. Still, he has gained a breathing space, and they will not have time to throw up much in the way of defences.

A party of twenty Germans broke out through the western road this morning, driving back our pickets. Undoubtedly, they are going to join some

of the chieftains on the west coast, Abdulla's especial enemies. It is difficult yet to say how this will affect us. At any rate, for the time being, it binds Abdulla, and Ali Hajji as well, to our side.

The Germans, we hear, have landed a lot of rifles. Sir Gerald has received several letters from Mati—one is from Miss Wrench, one from Walter Blackwood, whilst the other is signed by a number of young Englishmen. It is quite impossible to tell from his face what news those letters may contain. He reminds me of a man wearing a mask.

What a man, though! Soldier, administrator, mediæval adventurer and hero, great English gentleman, all in one; and I am not sure that one might not add "saint" as well. Saint—because his motives are absolutely pure, because his soul is absolutely clean. He simply could not do an unclean thing, because the tradition of cleanliness is bred in him, part of his being.

You will laugh, perhaps, to think of me as a hero-worshipper, of me, the blasé Fleet Street journalist, who has interviewed, and dissected mentally, almost all the heroes, and pseudo-heroes, of recent years.

Well, laugh away. They may be the last lines I ever write. We march soon, and I am anxious to get the MS. aboard the "Zeta." But, for once, I am in earnest.

I am a hero-worshipper. My hero is Sir Gerald Cardine, Raja of Katu. I would lay down my life for him, and it is by no means improbable that I shall have the chance of doing so before many hours are past.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE DASH ON MATI

Sir Gerald Cardine, by his own proclamation Raja of Katu, sat in a bamboo chair in the nipa-thatched shack which served him as headquarters. His elbows were resting on a low table, his face was buried in his hands.

Outside, a sentry, who had orders to admit no one, was pacing to and fro, stolidly, wondering why he was not allowed to smoke on duty.

All arrangements had been made for the dash on Mati. In another hour, the column would start. Dawn would see them pouring down the mountain road, to the attack. He was taking four hundred picked men, two mountain guns, and two Maxims ; leaving Parke the remainder of the force, another two hundred men or so.

The " Zeta " was to go round, and make a simultaneous attack from the sea, if necessary, though, until she saw the signal rockets from the hills, she was to keep out of view of the batteries on shore. Half a dozen of her crew were keen, experienced gunners, and they were spoiling for a fight ; but, on the other hand, some of the

imported Germans might be equally good marksmen.

He had done all he could do to ensure success. The fact that his attack was now expected had not disconcerted him in the least degree. He had hardly dared to hope to be able to keep Mati in ignorance for so long. So far as he could ascertain, he had the stronger force, and Ismail's men were far from being reliable. On the other hand, the German contingent was a very important factor, one on which he had not counted when first he laid his plans.

Still, he would capture the town. His men were not of the type to retreat, with the loot of Ismail's palace and the European merchants' stores before their eyes. But would it end with mere loot? The Asiatic loves a massacre as well, regarding it as an essential part of the game. Could he save the English women? Once more, he cursed Walter Blackwood's stupid obstinacy, which, by keeping the women in Mati, had added so greatly to his difficulties

Several times he had almost decided against the assault, had tried to persuade himself that, by cutting off supplies on the land side, he could bring the town to terms; then he had stiffened his back, and had remembered his duty to the Empire. He would be no true Cardine if, for the sake of one or two lives, he allowed Germany to acquire Katu. Patsy and the others had been given their chance; if they had not taken it they

must bear the consequences. Yet, none the less, he grew pale at the idea of what might happen.

During the last few days, the morphia craving had been strangely absent. The excitement and interest seemed to have carried him through, to have supplied the stimulant. Once, indeed, during a conference with the chieftains, he had gone two hours beyond the usual time without taking a pill.

He had done well that day : on the old schedule he was a quarter of a grain to the good, and there were now no extra doses ; but the cold fit was coming on again, and he had the biggest task of his life before him. If he ever needed the drug, he needed it now. Probably, he would take it every three hours during the coming strain. It would keep him up to the mark, keep him alert, clear-headed. Afterwards, when he had seized Mati, and so forced the hand of the British Government, the deluge might come. Vaguely, he hoped that, in the hour of his triumph, a bullet would take him, clean between the eyes. It would be such a far simpler death, than would be the case if he went down through morphia poisoning. And no one, save Margaret Cardine, would ever know.

Should he indulge in a little extra ? His hand trembled as he took the bottle. One pill—that was due, a little overdue ; it would still those tremors, put an end to that deadly coldness. Two pills—he put out a second one ; it would

mean exhilaration, temporary strength. Then, he put the second pill back in the bottle. He had promised her.

The pill did its work quickly. Within a few minutes he summoned his servants to pack up the last of his gear ; then stalked out to inspect his troops, who were already drawn up in some sort of ragged formation.

There was only a trail connecting Sudang Bay with Mati, and it would be a case of doing the march in single file ; but, as practically no baggage of any sort was being taken, there was no reason why the column should tail out unduly. The danger of a counter attack, of some of Ismail's adherents dashing out of the jungle and cutting the line, was small. So far, they had hardly had time to form any plans.

A murmur ran along the lines as the tall, white-clad figure appeared, a murmur which spoke of respect, of fear, almost of loyalty. A riding switch in his hand, an automatic pistol in a white buckskin holster—these were the Raja's sole weapons, whilst the sole signs of his sovereignty were the poise of his head, the flash in his eyes.

It was very difficult to believe that he was the man who, only a few months ago, had been merely a trader in Mati.

John Weste watched him with wondering admiration.

" Heredity," he remarked to Herbert Parke. " I suppose that is the result of being Cardine of

Cardine Place, of knowing you are the Head of the Cardines. But if anything happens to him, and that miserable little half-brother succeeds—" he broke off, and shrugged his shoulders.

Parke, who was extremely unhappy at being left behind in command of the base, growled, " Is the kid really a Cardine ? Is it legitimate ? "

Once more, the journalist shrugged his shoulders. " You know what Ettie Cardine's moral standard is. But you could never be in doubt as to this man's son."

Before the other could answer, Gerald Cardine had turned to them. He took Parke aside, gave him a few final instructions, said a few curt words of appreciation concerning his work, then handed him a sealed envelope. " This is for my cousin, Lady Cardine, in case anything happens to me," he said. " Only give it to her in that event. You understand ? "

## CHAPTER XXIII

### JOHN WESTE'S DIARY AGAIN

THEY say that a nightmare lasts only a few seconds. Then it is over, and, though you may awaken trembling, wet with perspiration, you are in bed, safe, and it is only a question of minutes before you are a normal man again.

But imagine, if you can, a nightmare which lasted, without intermission, from dusk till dawn, a long-drawn-out horror, which was no mere fiction of the brain, but was real, with real physical sufferings, real dangers.

Our march from Sudang Bay to Mati was such a nightmare. Mud and mountains ! I have been in some bad country, in Manchuria, in Thrace, in South Africa, but I have never seen anything to equal the jungle of Katu. Perhaps "seen" is not the right word, because it was too dark to make out anything. It was merely a case of stumbling forward blindly, of catching your feet in the roots of trees, of plunging ankle-deep, knee deep, even waist-deep, into mud, of being torn by huge thorns, stung by unseen plants, of toiling up impossibly steep and muddy rises, slipping back

a foot for every two feet you gained, of having your eyes so full of salt perspiration that you would not have been able to see, even in broad daylight, of sliding down a hillside where the twelve foot high grass, heavy with cold dew, drove home a chill which made you shiver to the bone, of having your boots so caked with mud that it was a weariness to lift them, of being so exhausted, so winded, that, had you not been a white man amongst coloured men, you would have lain down, in the mud, and prayed for death.

I am not exaggerating. Candidly, I do not know how I managed to pull through that night trek in the jungle. From the very outset, the pace was too stiff for me. I was near the head of the column, just behind the Chief himself, and there was no possibility of lagging, no chance of even a minute's rest.

Gerald Cardine seemed absolutely tireless. Not one of his native followers showed less signs of fatigue. He stalked on, as though mud, hills, and long grass, were non-existent.

We halted at about midnight. Heavens, how glad I was to throw myself down on the wet grass! At first I was too exhausted even to drink the brandy and soda which the Chief sent me; but after I had recovered a little, I took it, and it pulled me together; then my head servant came along, and suggested that it would be well to look for leeches. They found a dozen on me, some, which had recently affixed them-

selves, like tiny caterpillars, whilst the first-comers were bloated to a huge size. The leeches are not amongst the least of the plagues of the jungle of Katu.

After a while, Sir Gerald, who had been in conference with Abdulla, sent for me. Despite the hour, he had changed his muddy clothes, and was smart as ever. But there was a shadow in his eyes, an unwonted weariness in his voice.

"We are well up to time," he said. "We can stay here another hour, and still be at Mati at dawn. We're going to take the town, Weste—we must take it—but I feel, somehow, I am going down in the fight. If I do, you must take command. I think they will obey you. I know you will do your best. . . . Blackwood is a fool. He wrote me an insulting letter to-day, saying I am interfering with business, that he would probably do better under the German flag than the British, and hinting that I had swindled him in selling him my business. If I live, he will regret that later. I had another letter from Bartram, and several of the younger Englishmen. They want to cut in when we attack, and have managed to get rifles and ammunition hidden in the Club. That may prove useful. Then, Miss Wrench——" he paused, to light a fresh cigar, and seemed disinclined to continue.

"Yes, Miss Wrench?" I broke the silence at last.

There was unwonted passion in his eyes. "She's still there," he answered. "Why didn't she leave, she and Alice Blackwood? It isn't fair to me. These men of ours will be savages, if we take the town. It's piling up my anxieties. My God! I would have given anything to have had them out of it all. It's a hideous risk. But they must take their chance." He flung his newly-lighted cigar away, and buried his head in his hands.

When he looked up, his face was harder than ever, and, somehow, it seemed to me that I had never noticed before how many grey hairs he had.

"They must take their chance, Weste," he said, very quietly. "This is not my private concern. It is a matter for the Empire, a matter of vital importance. We can't think of lives, even the lives of those for whom we care," his face grew suddenly grey and drawn. "It's got to go on. . . . I did my best." Then, with one of his quick changes of mood, he told me of his plans for the attack. "You keep out of danger, as far as possible," he said. "Your business is to write the story, and, if I fall, to take my place. That wasn't in the original contract, I know, but I've got your measure now, and know that you could do it. Parke is just an overgrown boy."

When we started off again, the trail seemed better. Perhaps I had become accustomed to that abominable mud, or it may be that my

mind was too fully occupied with other things for the physical discomforts to count so greatly.

I had accepted Sir Gerald Cardine's charge. I, who had never filled any post higher than that of special correspondent for a London daily, had promised to act as Raja of Katu, in the event of the new Raja's death.

The whole thing had been done so quietly, with an entire absence of emotion. Gerald Cardine might have been asking me to represent him at some social function. I suppose I have the ordinary amount of courage served out to the men of this age, but I could never face the idea of death as the Chief did. As I tramped along, just behind him, I tried to analyse his attitude. There was nothing suicidal about it, and it could hardly be described as fatalism. It was rather that he seemed to see, in Death, the solution of some terrible problem. With the capture of Mati, the greater part of his work would be done. The raid on Katu would have succeeded, and it was difficult to see how the British Government could avoid taking over the island. Public attention would be focussed on Katu instantly, the public would probably come to realise the immense importance of the question, and the authorities at Home would be compelled to take action.

But why should he be so ready to die ? Why should he seem almost to welcome the idea of death ? There is some factor in Gerald Cardine's

life which I have not yet managed to grasp, something I do not understand in the least degree. His manner varies so tremendously, from moody silence to actual exhilaration, varies, occasionally, in a few minutes. Then there are times when he seems in actual pain, when his face is drawn, his hand unsteady, when every nerve seems to be racked.

It was about five o'clock when we halted again. The first streak of dawn had just appeared in the east.

Sir Gerald turned to me. "We are on the hill above Mati now," he said, in a quiet voice. "I am going to attack at once. Remember, I want you to keep out of danger, as far as possible. If I'm killed, so much will depend on you."

He stood for a moment, very still, staring towards the town; then, slowly, took a flask out of his pocket, poured some brandy and water into a cup, and stepped a little to one side, amongst the bush. A few seconds later, he returned, gave me a keen, questioning look, and immediately afterwards began to fire out his final instructions to his lieutenants.

The original plan had been for a double attack from the land side, as well as an attack—shell-fire—from the sea; but, on learning that Ismail knew of his presence at Sudang Bay, the Chief had altered his schemes entirely. Now, we had, it seemed, crossed over at the western pass, the furthest from Sudang, and were to pour down

that on to the town. It was certain that Ismail would have concentrated on the defence of the eastern road—herein was the explanation of that terrible, cross-country trek we had just made, that nightmare of mud and weariness—and that the other road would not be so well guarded.

Gerald Cardine knew the Asiatic; knew that the latter would reckon on his doing the obvious thing, and, therefore, did the thing which was not obvious, the thing against which a white enemy would have been on guard. Very few Asiatics would, willingly, have undertaken that terrible journey in the darkness.

The number of men who had fallen out was very small—Abdulla and Ali Hajji had trained their followers well—and all were surprisingly fit, keenly anxious to begin killing. I had wondered several times during the night about our artillery, the two mountain guns, and the two galloping Maxims. During the march, I had seen nothing of them, but now they were ready, dragged through that awful mud, up those appalling hills, by some marvel of human strength and endurance.

It was still too dark to see the town clearly, but I gathered from the Chief that our halting-place commanded it entirely, and that he was going to leave the two mountain guns, and fifty picked men, there, under the command of one of the "Zeta's" crew, an ex-naval gunner, who had been picked out for the job. If necessary, he could

shell almost any building in Mati, whilst the new German guns might find it hard to locate him. The Maxims we were to take with us.

" All quiet in the town "—a spy slid out of the gloom, and made that report.

I saw the Chief's brows contract. That same quietude seemed ominous. Surely, they knew we were coming; at any rate, they knew we were coming soon.

You could see the path plainly by the time we were half way down the slope leading to Mati. We halted again, whilst the scouts went forward, then, when they had reported that all was apparently clear, we went on once more. As we reached the level ground, where several roads coming from different parts of the town, join together at the foot of our mountain track, we could make out the sights of our rifles easily.

The Chief and Abdulla were almost at the head of the column, Ali Hajji being in command of the rearguard. The men were now all well together. There was no longer any tailing-off. Would not the laggard run the risk of losing his share of the loot ?

On the level, our men spread out, noiselessly, quivering with excitement, ready for the final dash. There was an open space, twenty yards in width on an average, strewn with large stones from the hillside, then the native houses began, nipa shacks perched high on bamboo frameworks, six or eight feet above the ground, scores of houses,

hundreds of hovels, apparently, huddled together.

A few cocks were crowing ; in the pens underneath the shacks, lean pigs were beginning to grunt hungrily ; a dozen dogs stretched themselves, scratched vigorously at their parasites ; then began to bark. But there was no sign of a human being.

Sir Gerald Cardine glanced at his army. All his men were now out of the jungle, all were ready ; then he turned to Abdulla, who was standing beside him, an even more wicked look than usual on his face.

I could see that it was the order for the attack that was being given, but that order was never finished.

Suddenly, from the nipa shacks in front of us a volley was poured in. Loopholes had been made in those palm leaf walls, and the unseen enemy was shooting at us from a few yards' range. The effect on our men, massed together as they were, was terrible. A dozen of them went down at once, and then, with lightning rapidity, a Maxim was rushed out into the road, and swung round to cover us.

It was the critical moment of the whole venture.

Had that machine gun got to work, our men would, inevitably, have broken and fled to cover ; and it would have been impossible to induce them to make a second attack. Yet, in the crisis, our luck held good.

Our men had recovered from the first shock, and were firing back, firing wildly at unseen enemies, but several had the sense to fire at the Maxim, and, whilst one bullet tore the cartridge belt of the gun, another took the white man who was in command clean through the throat.

I saw all that quite clearly, for I was standing still, watching with a kind of stupefied surprise, then it came home to me that Gerald Cardine was charging at the head of a yelling mob, and that the nearer I got to those nipa shacks, the less likely I was to be shot.

How long that first episode lasted I do not know. I was with the party which rushed the enemy's Maxim, and I remember clearly that two Germans, who stood their ground splendidly, were cut down, one of them by Abdulla's own kris, and that the Chief swore savagely because they had neither fled nor surrendered.

Every one seemed still to be shooting. Bullets were flying in every direction. Then there was a yell of triumph, followed by a yell of despair, a fierce crackling, a wave of hot air, a dense cloud of smoke enveloping us. Our men had fired the shacks, to burn out the defenders. That portion of Mati was doomed.

There was a lot of killing just then, as Ismail's men tumbled out of the houses, and they died game, as the number of our own dead testified.

The heat was growing awful—I remember that

part clearly. Next, there seemed to be no enemy in front of us, and we were charging down to the centre of the town. Cardine must have shouted something to me, for I knew we were heading for the big Square, and that the main fight had yet to come.

A shell screamed overhead, and burst somewhere on our front. Our gunner on the hillside had seen something, and had got to work. Another shell followed quickly, then another.

We were in a wide street now, cobbled, with stone-built houses on either side. What a long way it seemed.

Then, a turn in the road, and there was the Square. And in the centre of that Square was a fort, hastily constructed, crude, but equipped with four seven-pounders, and full of men, white as well as brown.

All this time—it can only have been a few minutes really—the Chief had been ahead. Now, he held up his hand, stopping the rush. He had seen barbed wire coiled on the ground, and to go on was suicide.

Panting, half-blinded with perspiration, dimly conscious that my side had been scored by a bullet, I found myself leaning against the wall of a house. Those seven-pounders had only got off a couple of rounds before we were back, round the turn in the road.

The next move—what was it to be? For the first time, I saw a look of indecision on Gerald

Cardine's face. The men were blood-hot. It was now or never.

Our little mountain guns were still firing, and it was obvious that they were shooting at that fort, but they did not seem to have accomplished much as yet.

Another scream in the air, a scream from the harbour side, followed by a loud explosion—instantly, the Chief's face cleared. It must be the " Zeta," shelling the fort. But half-a-dozen more shells came in such rapid succession and the reports were so heavy that his frown came back. The " Zeta " had no quick-firers of that size.

Really, it had been little more than a question of seconds, a breathing space, since we had retreated, a question of minutes only since the firing of the first shot.

Cardine strode over to me. " Give the guns a few minutes longer," he said hoarsely. " Those fellows in the fort will find it too hot, being shelled from both sides. Then, somehow, we must get through that barbed wire."

Three more shells from the sea, two more from the mountain guns ; then—absolute silence.

Regardless of the risk—the fort was full of men with rifles waiting for us to reappear—the Chief strode forward to the turn in the road, stood very still for a moment, then waved his helmet.

" They've surrendered," he cried as I reached his side. " They've had enough. Mati is ours.

And, by God, Weste, look at that steamer, look at her, the one that's been firing, that's saved us. It's not the 'Zeta' at all. It's the 'White Lady'."

I glanced up at him, and saw that his face was deadly white.

So Margaret Cardine had taken a hand in the Great Game.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### IN MATI: THE DIARY AGAIN

A SHAMBLES—that was the only possible way of describing the condition of that fort in the square at Mati. It had been constructed very hastily, though the man who made it had known his work—they were never sure afterwards which body was his—but it had never entered into the mind of its builder that 4.7 shells, perfectly aimed, perfectly timed, might come screaming in from seaward. He had seven pounders, a couple of Maxims, and many riflemen; moreover, he had all the houses round the Square garrisoned by loyal, or pseudo-loyal, subjects of the Raja Ismail. And, above all, he had that terrible barbed wire. But he felt so certain of the land attack that he withdrew his gunners from the harbour fort, and, as I said before, the possibility of 4.7 shells never entered into his head.

No one can blame that German officer. Had the first shell not killed him, he would have found that Sir Gerald Cardine was as greatly surprised as himself. Perhaps the greatest thing about

Lady Cardine's achievement was that she had managed to keep her plans a dead secret.

A shambles! I could not have believed that shell-fire could have been so appallingly effective. Every gun was out of action, nearly every white man in the fort was killed or wounded. From the houses round the square, Ismail's men were pouring, their rifles left behind, scurrying to cover.

Supposing those terrible guns should be turned on them!

The mountain guns had, we found, accomplished very little, as they only commanded one corner of the fort. They, alone, could never have saved the situation.

From one building, however, men did not scurry. Instead, they came out on to the balcony, a score or more of them, rifles in hand, and cheered and cheered again at the sight of the Chief. That building was the Mati Club, which, for the last twenty-four hours, had sheltered almost all the British in the town.

Carl Gunther, it seemed, had urged an attack on it, and Ismail had agreed; but the German officer had vetoed the idea promptly.

"It is not my affair to make a local disturbance into an international matter," he said stiffly. "Those gentlemen have done nothing which would justify their being murdered. It is no crime in them to wish for the success of their countryman," he had looked rather hard at Albert Darkin as he said the last words. Mr. Darkin had

flushed. Somehow, he had never felt at ease in the presence of this starched, ceremonious person, who had a ridiculous " von " before his name. He preferred the ordinary German, the man to whom you could talk business.

This, of course, I learnt later, when Darkin was waiting to be hanged, and the fear of death, and what would come after death, had made him slobberingly truthful.

As we entered the Square, those of the defenders of the fort who were able to move, streamed out of it, leaving only the dead and dying. There was to be no more attempt at defence. Mati was ours.

The chief turned to Abdulla. " I shall make my headquarters in the Palace," he said curtly. " Take fifty men—no, wait, though. I must send some one with you. . . . Mr. Weste, would you go to the Club, and ask Mr. Bartram—I see him in the balcony—to come here."

He was standing there, cool and unmoved, when I returned, accompanied by half a dozen young Englishmen. For a moment, his face softened into a smile of welcome ; then he seemed to remember, and to become once more the new Raja. Instinctively, the others saluted.

" Gentlemen," he returned the salute gravely. " I have, as you see, taken over the government of this island. I trust I shall have your loyalty. I appoint you all temporary members of my staff. Will you, Mr. Bartram, take command of fifty men, and occupy the Palace ? The chief, Abdulla,

will accompany you. Be careful that there is no looting, and that all the female inmates leave in peace. The ex-Raja, Ismail, you will arrest."

Jack Bartram saluted again. He understood the position, the necessity for stiffness before that horde of semi-savages.

"I think the Palace is abandoned already, sir," he answered. "From the Club, we could see them streaming out just as the fort surrendered."

The chief's eyes flashed. "And Ismail? Did he bolt too?"

The other shrugged his shoulders. "Probably. Gunther and Darkin were with him."

"I want them as well. I want all white men who were not in the Club with you. But, hurry, hurry! Ismail must be caught."

Already, Abdulla had his fifty men ready, and within a minute or two that silent Palace was echoing with the shouts of the invaders.

No difficulty had been placed in the way of the escape of Ismail's men, provided they had no rifles, and now practically only the dead and wounded remained. Behind us, the native town was still burning furiously, a blaze with which it would be impossible to cope; though, at the same time, the direction of the wind made it unlikely that the more solid portions of the town would catch fire.

Hitherto, our men had behaved well, obeying orders far more readily than I had expected.

Now, however, they began to grow uneasy. They were thieves by nature, many were thieves by profession; and they had come to loot Mati. Were Abdulla and his fifty to get all the rich booty of the Palace, whilst they remained standing there in the Square?

Evidently Cardine saw what was in their minds, for he ordered our two Maxims, which had taken no part in the fight, to be wheeled up to the Club, and placed on the veranda; then, after giving instructions for food and drink to be supplied to his troops, he, himself, walked slowly towards the Club, followed by his new staff.

Just as he was entering, a rifle shot rang out from the top of the Square. A single glance told us what had happened. One of our men had been trying to steal from a Chinaman's store, and, on the owner resisting, had killed him.

"Mr. Locock," the new Raja turned sharply to a tall, heavily-built young Englishman, "I appoint you Provost-Marshal. Take ten of my bodyguard—they are reliable—and hang that man from the belfry. . . . Mr. Wheeler," he addressed a man whose eyes had literally been glittering with excitement all through. "You have been a Gunner. You will get those two Maxims into position, in case of an attempt at rescue," then, for a moment, his stern manner relaxed, and he placed a kindly hand on young Locock's shoulder. "I'm sorry to have to ask you to do it. It's a beastly job."

The other seemed to choke a little. "Any of us would do anything for you, Jerry," he answered, then hurried away.

A minute later, we were in the smoking-room, and every one of the Chinese Club servants seemed to be engaged in opening champagne. Now, amongst his own people, his old comrades, the chief was once more "Jerry" yet I noticed that, though there was affection, regard, pride on their faces and in their voices, there was no familiarity, no slaps on the back, no attempts at hand-shaking. He had made himself a man apart.

It was an elderly man, named Mallowe, the former British Consul, who proposed his health.

"Raja Sir Gerald Cardine," he cried. "The man who has done, single-handed, what the British Government feared to do, the man who has euchred the German Government and Carl Gunther, as well as those sweeps, Lecher and the Darkins, the traitors."

Again and again they cheered; then Gerald was holding up his hand for silence. "Gentlemen, I thank you," his voice was none too steady. "I hope it will not be many days before I hand over my State to a British governor. But the credit for to-day's victory is not mine. That yacht saved us—for her help was quite unexpected by me. But for her, I should have failed."

The men in the room exchanged glances of astonishment. Naturally, they had imagined it to be part of the plan. "It's the 'White

Lady,'" some one remarked, "Lady Cardine's yacht."

Cardine nodded. "Yes, my cousin's yacht," he answered very quietly, so quietly that I found myself looking at him anxiously. Was one of those strange fits of depression coming on him at this critical moment?

"I am going to take possession of the small card-room," he was speaking again. "I must form my provisional government at once, and I shall need all you fellows. But I want to be alone for a few minutes. Will you tell the boy to bring me up a small bottle of champagne, and some biscuits?" then, with a nod to the company in general, he was gone.

Some one voiced the prevailing sentiment, "Jerry's done up. We'll have to rally round him, and do our best."

"He'll be all right in a quarter of an hour," it was the doctor who spoke. He was a newcomer in Mati, and had never seen the Chief before, but I had noticed how keenly he had been watching the other's face.

For a minute or two, I was kept busy answering questions about the raid generally, about our fort at Sudang Bay, about our mountain guns on the hillside, about what other chiefs in the interior had given us their allegiance.

"He must have had a huge sum of money to buy the scoundrels," old Mallowe remarked. "And he'll have to pay a lot more to keep them,

if he's not going to let them loot. He's raised a Frankenstein's monster by giving them rifles. And those fellows on the west side are going to give trouble yet. The Germans who went out to arm and organise them are pretty sharp customers."

There was a murmur of assent; then, "Where's their pal, the man with the moustache?" some one asked. "Locock told him not to come here again."

"Mr. Reggie Burnham." Mallowe answered, "He was with Darkin and Gunther. I expect they've all cleared."

I heaved a sigh of relief, being by no means anxious for any of these to fall into Sir Gerald's hands. A moment later, the suggestion was made that we should go on to the veranda, "to see how Locock was getting on."

One glance served to show me that the Chief had been very wise in placing those Maxims in the Club veranda, so as to command the Square. Our men were very far from relishing the swift justice which was just being carried out on their comrade. To hang a man merely for killing a Chinese storekeeper! Hands were gripping the hafts of krises, fingers were itching on triggers; but there were always those two Maxims, with their trained crews, and with that soldierly-looking stranger in command. Wheeler looked entirely happy as he puffed at his cigar. He had the situation in hand.

By the belfry, we could see Locock's huge,

ungainly figure. His men seemed busy with some task, then he raised his helmet, stepped back quickly, and a white clad object was dangling in the air.

A murmur ran through the other men in the Square, but nothing more happened. After all, the dead remain dead, and these white men were very masterful, men to be obeyed, at least so long as they can cover you with a Maxim gun. Moreover, the morning meal would soon be ready, and the Raja had ordered an immense distribution of cigars and cigarettes.

Locock came back towards the Club slowly, his head a little bent ; but he looked up sharply enough when he saw one of Abdulla's men draw his kris on one of Ali Hajji's—they had quarrelled over a fowl—and, a few seconds later, the Provost-Marshal of Mati had a fresh prisoner.

" Tommy takes himself seriously," a youngster remarked.

Old Mallowe growled. " A damned good thing too. Hasn't it entered into your head that we're sitting on a powder magazine, with lighted candles about ? "

Outside the main entrance of the Palace, a guard of ten men was now stationed ; but there was no sign of what was happening within.

" His Highness wantee you," it was one of the Chinese waiters speaking.

The window of the small card-room looked out over the harbour. Cardine was standing at it,

staring at the large white yacht, which was now anchored some three hundred yards from the shore. He was himself again now, though the champagne was but half finished, alert, upright, clear-headed, yet, as he turned towards me, there was some quality in his eyes, a kind of softness, which I had never seen there before.

"Well?" he asked quietly.

"Mr. Locock has hanged his man," I answered. "And Mr. Bartram is still in the Palace. Our brigands are settling down to the business of feeding."

He nodded thoughtfully. "I've planned out how to use all these fellows," he pointed to a list on the table. "You must get to Singapore, of course, and cable your story. I can't think where the 'Zeta' is, but I'll commandeer one of these trading steamers for you. Nothing else shall leave Mati meanwhile. You will have it all to yourself. First, however, I want you to go aboard the yacht, and tell Lady Cardine." I can swear his voice shook a little. "Tell Lady Cardine all about things. You understand?"

It seemed to me that I understood a good deal more than he thought. "Is there any letter for her?" I asked.

He sat down at the table, and drew the writing pad towards him; then got up, abruptly.

"No," he replied. "I will go aboard, later. Only, tell her I have kept my promise." He turned once more towards the window, and stared again

at the yacht, on the bridge of which I could now make out the white-clad figure of a woman. One of the yacht's boats was being cleared away. "Go quickly," he went on. "We have been long enough already."

There was one thing I wanted to say. "About Darkin, Sir Gerald," I began.

He stopped me impatiently. "I haven't got him yet. I'll hear what you have to say before I hang him. I've sent down to the quay to have a boat ready for you."

As I set foot on the deck of the "White Lady," its owner came forward to meet me, both hands outstretched. Heavens! What a beautiful woman she was! Now, her pallor and agitation seemed to have rendered her even more lovely than when I had seen her in London.

She threw all reserve to the winds. "Is he safe, is he safe?" she asked breathlessly.

"Quite safe and well," I answered.

I would have given ten years of my life to see such a light come into a woman's eyes for me. To have the love of such a woman, to have her for your own, soul and body, living but for you, responding to your every caress—that would be Life indeed!

For a moment she stood very still, seemingly too greatly moved to speak; then she beckoned to the skipper, a tall, grim-faced man named Simpson, introduced him to me, and, after that, we sat together under the awning whilst I told my story.

She listened in absolute silence until I told her of our first arrival in the Square, and of our retreat. Then she leaned forward, her wonderful face glowing.

"You say we saved you all?" she asked breathlessly. "Saved him from defeat?"—she had not yet mentioned him by name.

I nodded. "There was barbed wire, as well as the guns, and the riflemen in all the houses. We had no possible chance. Your shell fire was wonderful, Captain."

The skipper flushed awkwardly. "Her ladyship gave me a free hand to get the best men possible. There wasn't much waste of ammunition. I guess the 4.7s surprised them. . . . Lucky we were in time. We picked up the 'Zeta' yesterday. She had a head wind, and her auxiliary engine had broken down," then he relapsed into silence.

That, then, was the explanation of the "White Lady's" appearance at the psychological moment.

I told them of the present state of affairs in the town, of the measures the Chief was taking, of the necessity of keeping a very firm hold on our men.

"We can let him have some good ex-bluejackets can't we, Captain Simpson?" Lady Cardine said eagerly. "We have almost a double crew, all ex-navy men; and, of course our guns will command the whole town. But how about the white women? Did you see them?"

Curiously enough, I had forgotten that there were any in Mati. I admitted as much, adding, "I don't believe Sir Gerald mentioned them either—in fact, I'm sure he didn't. I suppose he assumed they were safe somewhere."

A strange look of relief, almost of exultation, came into her eyes. "Did he not ask for Miss Wrench?" she demanded.

Quite truthfully, I answered in the negative. I had been with him all the time; then I remembered his message. "He wanted me to tell you something," I said.

At once the skipper got up and left us. "What is it?" she asked eagerly.

I watched her face closely as I answered, "That he had kept his promise."

In an instant, there were tears in her eyes. "Thank God, thank God!" she murmured. "Oh, Mr. Weste, that means a greater thing than the taking of Mati." If ever a woman was transfigured with a wholly sacred joy, Margaret Cardine was at that moment. I remember that it struck me how futile, how unreal after all, were most of the pictures of the Mother of God.

As I left the "White Lady"—I had been aboard over two hours—she asked me again. "He is coming off, to see—us?"

"As soon as he can," I answered. "He promised that, and he owes his victory to you."

She held up a protesting hand. "No, no. You must never say that. Remember, my name

is not to appear at all in your report. I arranged that with Mr. Gloag."

I had a good deal to think about as I was rowed back to the shore. So it was Margaret Cardine who had pulled the strings, supplied the money—and checkmated Sir Joseph Darkin! I could picture the latter's face when he learnt the news. Truly, Time brought its revenges.

Margaret Cardine, of all people, Margaret Cardine, formerly Margaret Houstoune, whom he had—Faugh! What nauseous creatures those Good Darkins were!

It was an abominable story. Still, the time had come when I must tell Gerald Cardine; and I dreaded the task.

As I entered the Club, Locock stopped me. "Will you go and see Mr. Mallowe?" he said. "He's in command of the town. Jerry Cardine—the Raja, I mean—has started up country in pursuit of Ismail, who has carried off Miss Wrench."

## CHAPTER XXV

### RAJA ISMAIL'S COUP

THE dose of morphia which Gerald had taken on leaving the smoking-room had pulled him together very quickly. So much had happened since the last pill that he had really lost count of time; now, however, when he came to consult the watch on his wrist he realised, with something like a shock, that he had over-run his time by three hours.

He was conscious of a strange thrill of pleasure, of a new-born pride. After all, had he reason to hope, was he going to conquer the abomination? Never since he had realised the effect it was having on him, had he felt so free, been conscious of the same sense of exhilaration. No increase in the regular doses during the past three months, all "extra doses" cut off, and, now, a clear gain of three hours under particularly trying conditions.

Might he really venture to hope? She, his goddess, was there, only a few hundred yards away. She had saved him that morning, saved him from defeat, probably from death. Was she

going to save him, too, from the Hell in which he had been living ?

She loved him, that most glorious of God's creatures loved him, in spite of her knowledge of his failing. The fact came home to him now. Only a woman who loved would have done what she had done for him. Even if they had not known of the morphia, the vast majority, being placed as she was, immensely wealthy, entirely independent, would have shrunk from the risks and sacrifices involved in marrying a man like himself. He could not even give her the title. Already, she was Lady Cardine, and the widow of the great Secretary of State for War must, of necessity, overshadow the wife of the new, and unknown, baronet.

Yet she had come to his aid. She had made him that amazing gift of half a million sterling. True, it had come after young Parke had given away the secret to Burnham, who, in turn, had betrayed it to Mrs. Cardine ; but, none the less, it had made his raid possible ; and now she had turned that raid into a triumphant success.

It was her victory. And she loved him, she loved him ! He was utterly devoid of vanity, but he knew that a woman only does such things for the man she loves.

Could he conquer the morphia, could he be his own master again, arbiter of his own destiny ? For the last two years he had been quite hopeless, reckoning himself to be doomed. He had put up

a hard fight, because he hated to give way ; but, to a great extent, it had been a soulless fight. He had had no particular object in winning, no reward at the end of it all, even if he had won. Now, suddenly, he had been allowed this vision of Heaven, and it seemed to have given him new life, new hope.

Whatever he might have felt once, he knew now that Katu itself was as nothing compared with Margaret Cardine.

It is a splendid thing to have principles, enthusiasms, a mission, a noble thing, and many a noble man has given his life for his ideas ; but, looking at the question from a sane point of view, was there ever yet a cause which was stronger than the love of a woman, of the One Woman ? Putting on one side those purely modern Crusades, in which the Crusaders have a financial interest, such as the Congo or the Balkans, was there ever a real man who gave his life for a cause except in the hope of winning the love of a good woman, or out of hopelessness of ever being loved by the One Woman.

The man who can do great things must be capable of great love, sexual love. Sex is the one Reality of Life, the one driving force. By love alone—and love means the sexual instinct in its highest manifestations—is man brought into touch with the Divine. The man is imperfect, incomplete, without the woman, or, rather, without the desire for the woman. He may never

find her ; he may fret his life away in the search ; but, so long as he does search, he will keep the Divine in himself alive.

The correct, smug products of to-day, the earnest workers, the pale-faced students, the good youths who are absorbed in their daily duties and find their recreation in consorting with their fellow Gadarenes, at Associations or Brotherhoods—of what use are they to the world ? True, many of them amass wealth, and marrying discreetly, succeed in bringing into the world smug and discreet children, who will carry on the family traditions ; but is the world any better or happier because they have lived in it ?

Their Brotherhoods and Societies are an insult to Love, because Sex, the one great factor in life, is reviled at every meeting, reviled by those who are too debased in mind ever to have felt passion, ever to have realised that the mere acquisition of wealth is a waste of God's gifts, an insult to the Creator, unless the Love of Woman is the ultimate object. Ambition, personal ambition, the desire for self-glorification, inevitably ends in crime against the common cause.

Love, and Love only, counts. The man who does not love, or desire to love, a woman has no right to live. He merely cumbers the earth. He has no spark of the Divine in him, and for him death must mean the end of all things. Only those who love can possibly live beyond the grave, for Love alone is immortal.

In the first place, Gerald Cardine had been ready to give his life for the acquisition of Katu because he had no hope of conquering the morphia habit, and because it seemed the cleanest way out. His life would not have been wholly wasted. He had always hungered for love, but the drug had seemed to render love an impossibility, so he had decided to die according to the way of the Cardines, die for his country, though, in his saner moments, he had realised that, death being inevitable, the sacrifice would not be so great.

Then, Margaret Cardine had come into his life, and all the latent forces in him had come out. He had learnt to love wildly, passionately, hopelessly it seemed. What chance could there be for a man with the curse of the Poppy Heads on him ? Death had become more than ever desirable. To put an end to his misery, that endless longing, and to die in conquering Katu for the Empire seemed the finest way. His life would not have been wasted, he would fall in a way befitting Cardine of Cardine Place, and, most important of all, she would cherish his memory.

At times during the last few months, the agony had seemed almost unendurable, the agony of desire, the fear that she would belong to some one else. Night after night, he had pictured her with himself—and with the other man. There was a fragrance about her, a sweetness which no other woman had, a gracious tenderness which, with the right man, would change to almost primitive

passion. Everything about her seemed to speak of the possibilities of love.

It was hopeless, hopeless, hopeless, so far as he was concerned—he had told himself that, time after time. And so he had come to Katu intending to be killed. He wanted to do the Empire's work first, yet, somehow, the Empire had become a secondary consideration compared with Margaret Cardine.

Now, as he stood at the window in the Club card-room, and stared towards the "White Lady," all seemed changed.

She loved him—and he was holding his own against the drug. Nay, more, now that he came to reckon it up, he was doing more than hold his own; he was actually taking less. Formerly, there had been those innumerable "extra doses"; and to-day he had gained three hours without suffering.

She loved him! He could do anything now. In time, he might give it up altogether.

Then, suddenly, came the desire to live, to live for her sake. With this new hope in him, why should he seek death? Doctors might be able to help him, and with her encouragement, her love—after looking for death for so long, the idea that it might be possible to live on seemed inexpressibly sweet and wonderful.

Still, there was the immediate present to consider. He pulled himself together, made out a list of the men whom he intended to employ,

and the positions they were to have, then sent for John Weste, and dispatched him to the yacht.

In turn, he sent for the others, received their promises of allegiance, and gave them a few brief words of instruction as to their duties. They were all men he could trust, men who did not want long explanations. Just as he finished, Jack Bartram stalked in, hot and excited. He had not even stopped for a drink as he came up.

"Searched the Palace from top to bottom, Sir Gerald," he reported, formally. "Found no one at all, except some old women, half-dead with fright. Phew! Except for the banqueting hall and audience chambers, it's a regular pig-sty—or a combination of sty and rabbit warren. You can't take up your quarters there. I've collared all the papers I could find—that's what's taken me so long, but I should say that enormous numbers have been burnt. They've had a regular bonfire in one of the courts."

Gerald frowned. "So Ismail has escaped! That may mean a long hunt. Where are Darkin and Gunther?"

"Up at Darkin's, I expect. Earwaker, the missionary, did a bunk when he heard of your plans."

The new Raja took one or two turns up and down the room. "Will you call Locock?" he said at last. When the Provost-Marshal came, "Mr. Locock, will you kindly arrest Darkin, Gunther, and a man named Burnham? Have them

watched very closely, because the charge against them will be a capital one. Yes, gentlemen, I am not at all inclined to be merciful," in answer to their looks of surprise; then, suddenly, he seemed to remember something else. "Where is Blackwood? I haven't seen him yet."

Locock shrugged his shoulders. "Up at his house, I suppose. He doesn't come here now. There've been rows—about you. He's pig-headed you see, thinks of nothing but business. And he's said rude things. Really, it seemed as though he would join hands with Ismail and his crowd. So we all cut him. Silly little blighter!"

"And Miss Wrench?" Gerald's question came sharply. He was a little ashamed of himself for having forgotten her for so long.

Jack Bartram answered. "We—she, I mean—agreed it would be better for her to stay with the Blackwoods, as she wouldn't go away. Her father's there, too. . . . I say, Jerry, old man," he seemed suddenly to forget that the other was now Raja of Katu, "Jerry, it was decent of you to send that ten thousand. She told me. You see, we're chums, great chums."

Somehow, the words seemed very welcome to Gerald. It was as though some weight had been lifted off him. "I'm glad, awfully glad," he said. "It would be better, though, if she and Mrs. Blackwood came down here. Their bungalow is a bit far out, and I can't trust my ruffians. Lady Cardine will have them on the 'White

Lady,'" the thought struck him suddenly. "That'll be the best plan . . . Hullo!"

He sprang to his feet, as a white man, filthy, dishevelled, blood-bespattered, staggered into the room. It was a moment before he realised that this was the usually-immaculate Walter Blackwood.

Locock and Bartram stared at the new-comer in inarticulate amazement; but Gerald Cardine took him sternly by the shoulder.

"What's this?" he demanded. "Pull yourself together, man."

Blackwood stared at him vacantly for a space of seconds; then began to curse wildly. "Damn you, Jerry, this is your doing. Damn you, damn you! What's your Imperialism to me, beside my wife? Where's that confounded doctor? Alice is shot—shot, I tell you, and may be dead now."

Instantly, Gerald was master of the situation. "Send the doctor up with an escort of twenty men. You had better go with him yourself, Bartram. I expect it's all right with Patsy," he laid a kindly hand on the other's shoulder. "I'll see to Blackwood. . . . Locock, fetch some brandy." Then, very gently, he forced the merchant into a chair. Already he had divined that the other was not wounded, that the blood on his clothes came from some one else.

There must have been some magic in the new Raja's touch; at any rate, it seemed to calm

Walter Blackwood. He drank off the brandy, a very stiff dose, lay back for a few minutes with his eyes closed, then sat up, apparently a sane man again.

"You sent the doctor?" that was his first question.

Gerald nodded. "Yes. What has happened?"

Once more, Blackwood began to curse. At heart, he was a weak man, perhaps a coward as well.

"Stop that, and tell me the story." Gerald's voice was very stern.

The other shivered. "It was Ismail, Ismail and his friends, Gunther, Darkin, and that Burnham fellow. They had cleared from the Palace with about fifty men. It was Patsy he wanted, Ismail said," both Gerald and Locock clenched their hands. "They were all drunk. I tried to argue, to appeal to Darkin and Gunther; but it wasn't any good. Ismail's men made a rush, and both Alice and Patsy fired. Patsy hit Ismail in the groin, and Alice got Gunther through the lung. I don't know whether I hit anyone. It was all over so quickly. I don't know who shot Alice, but it's bad, terrible. I did all I could. They thought I was dead. I heard them say so as they dragged Patsy off. What more could I do?" he ended pitifully.

Gerald Cardine's eyes were blazing. He was too savagely angry to care in the least degree how the other had behaved. Anyway, he could not

have altered the ultimate result. A few quick questions as to the time when it had happened, the direction the party had taken, then he took two or three turns up and down the room, apparently trying to arrive at some decision.

Blackwood s voice broke in on his thoughts. " They left Gunther behind, ' he said. " He was too bad to travel."

The Raja started. " Mr. Locock, go and fetch him ; and hang him, at once, over the Palace door."

" You can't, you can't," the merchant laughed hysterically. " You can't hang a man without a head. Don't be a fool, Jerry. When they'd gone I found a kris, and cut his head off. I had to make three shots at it. This was his blood." Then he rested his head on his hands, and began to sob.

" Take him away, Locock." There was not a shade of sympathy in Gerald's voice. " Send Mallowe up to me at once. He'll have to take charge here. I'm going after Ismail."

A few minutes later, Jack Bartram burst into the room, breathless, wild-eyed.

" You've heard ? " he cried. " Give me some men. I'm going after them. It's my place to go. There's not a minute to lose."

Gerald's voice was quite calm now. " I'm going myself. You can come too. . . One thing, though, old fellow. The worst won't happen, yet. Ismail is shot through the groin."

For a moment, Jack did not seem to understand; then he drew his hand across his eyes. "Thank God," he muttered. "Patsy—in his power. By Heaven," he trembled with sudden passion, "when I find him, I'll shoot him through the head."

Half an hour later, a party of fifty picked natives set out under the command of the Raja. Bartram was the only other white man. All had volunteered, but Gerald had declined their services. This was to be a forced march in the fullest sense of the term.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE CARELESSNESS OF GERALD CARDINE

"It's the Rule of the Rope. Hang it all, I think Cardine is going too far, or Daddy Mallowe is interpreting his orders too literally. Locock has hanged three men out of hand this morning. Why the deuce does he want to string them up in front of everybody?" The speaker, a clerk in the office of the Pepper Trust, had only left his suburban home three months previously, and had still a distaste for the crude realities of life. Just fancy seeing a man hanged on the Sydenham tennis ground, hanged without the shadow of a trial? He gulped his drink down, and looked virtuous.

The other man, who had known Gerald Cardine for years, laughed. "You've hit off the situation, quite unconsciously. 'Hang it all,' you say—that is the safest rule in Katu. There's no sense in being squeamish. Those unpleasant-looking persons, whom our Provost-Marshal has suspended from the belfry, would cheerfully have cut your throat if they had happened to meet you. Instead, they cut the throats of two Chinamen and

three Hindoos. . . . You had better be careful, my friend," his manner changed suddenly. " It's ill work playing the fool with our new Raja. Don't forget he is a Cardine, the Cardine ! "

In the small card-room of the Club, which had now become the headquarters of the Government of Mati—men avoided the Palace like a plague—Daddy Mallowe was up to his eyes in work. He was revelling in his task, and, incidentally, was doing it extremely well.

For years, prior to the visit of Mr. Lecher, M.P., he had been British Consul, and he knew the island as few others did. Practically speaking, he had lived his life in Katu, and now, when he was an old man, his chance had come. There was only one regret—he had the power of life and death, Gerald having suspended all legal formalities, and he thought of the many men he would have liked to execute in days gone by. It seemed such a pity. If only Mr. Lecher would chance to land, Mr. Lecher, the Sunday School teacher, who arranged the Railway Strike, which coincided so strangely with Germany's threats of war over the North African question, the wealthy Mr. Lecher, with his motor car and his three flats in town, the man who, a few years before, had been jubilant over a rise of a shilling a week.

Daddy Mallowe had done well in the few hours which had followed Gerald's departure. The guns in Ismail's fort were all useless—the 4.7 shells had settled them—but he had sent for the

two mountain guns, and, with the aid of the Maxims and some sandbags, had turned the club into a very serviceable fort. Then Horne, the shipping agent, who had been years on the China Coast, was enlisting all the Chinese, the Malays' natural enemies, whilst Wheeler had collected together some twenty Sikhs, all ex-soldiers. Of course, too, the guns of the " White Lady " commanded the whole town. Consequently, it was not likely that either Abdulla or Ali Hajji would try a counter-revolution, especially as they still had the balance of their pay to come, and had already quarrelled with one another.

The problem of feeding and housing the poorer natives was likely to become a serious one. All the nipa shacks had been burnt, and their former owners seemed dazed and helpless. True, Gerald had given his deputy a free hand so far as money went, power to draw on Wang Tu Fu for whatever he needed, but the difficulty of getting the people to start rebuilding remained. So long as they had free food, they would merely loaf about, sheltering anywhere, breeding disease.

John Weste had left for Singapore within an hour of his return from the " White Lady," left in a small tramp steamer which had happened to be in the harbour, but all other shipping was to be held up for forty-eight hours. Gerald knew the value of the censorship; moreover, the *Comet* was to have the exclusive story.

Several hours had elapsed since Gerald's hurried

departure, when Captain Simpson landed with twenty well-armed, uniformed sailors. The men in the Club hurried out and greeted him with cheers, remembering the gunnery of that morning; the sailor flushed and saluted awkwardly. "It wasn't my doing," he said, as they rushed him into the smoking-room, and shouted for champagne. "You must cheer her ladyship. I just obeyed orders. Now, she's sent off these fellows as a bodyguard for Sir Gerald."

"Sir Gerald's not here. He's gone in pursuit of Ismail," a dozen voices gave the skipper the news.

There was no mistaking Captain Simpson's consternation. "Gone! Why? When?"

They explained things to him, at rather unnecessary length, for champagne had been flowing freely all day, and the really useful members were all busy, carrying out Daddy Mallowe's orders. As soon as he had the gist of the story, the skipper would listen to no more.

"I must go back on board and report," he said. "Meantime, who's commandant here? I'll turn these fellows of mine over to him."

The eyes of Wheeler, formerly subaltern in the R.F.A., glowed when they fell on those twenty ex-bluejackets. He understood now why every one of those 4.7 shells had burst in the right place, and he felt an unholy desire to egg either Abdulla or Ali Hajji on to start a counter-revolution. He had left the service under a cloud—how could he

prove that the major's stupid young wife was lying about him to shield another man ?—but his professional keenness remained, and he did not love Malays. It was hard to think that he had taken no active part in the fight of that morning. Still, there was the chance that Jerry Cardine would give him regular employment ; anything would be better than grinding away as clerk for a pepper-growing company. He put his hand tenderly on the mountain guns, and thought of the ledgers he had been handling of late. Those had never sent any thrill through him.

It was barely an hour later when Daddy Mallowe, who was taking a few minutes' rest, his feet on the table, an extra large cigar between his lips, suddenly came to attention. Lady Cardine was downstairs, and wished to see him at once.

For a moment, he was dumfounded. A woman in the Mati Club ! Even Patsy Wrench had never dared to set foot on the steps. Then he remembered. The Club had become Headquarters, and it was Margaret Cardine who had saved the situation. He turned forward to meet her.

One glance showed him that she was in trouble. Her beauty remained—that could never change—but she was pale, agitated, almost nervous, and there was a shadow of pain in her glorious eyes.

She wasted no words. " Why did you let him

go ? " she demanded. " Why didn't some one else go ? Surely his place was here."

It was years since Mallowe had met a woman like this, and he blundered badly. " Wel', you see, Lady Cardine, he's not an easy man to control. He goes his own way ; and he was always awfully fond of Patsy."

" No one else would do ? I see." She was trying to speak calmly. " He thought it was his duty ? But the dangers—the dangers must be terrible. This was his place, here, to complete his work. Was he the only man who dared to go ? "

Mallowe winced under her sarcasm, and, a moment later, she knew how unjust she had been. " They all wanted to go," he answered, quietly. " But he would take only Bartram."

For a full half-minute, she stared out of the window ; then turned to him with shining eyes.

" Forgive me, Mr. Mallowe," she said, making no attempt at concealing her emotion. " My—my cousin is very dear to me, and it seems such a terrible risk to have taken, after all he had been through. If they cut him off in those dreadful hills—" she thrust out her hands with a hopeless gesture.

Looking at Daddy Mallowe, at his yellow, wrinkled face and grey, mutton-chop whiskers, no one would have suspected him of sentiment ; yet he took those hands in his, and kissed them, reverently.

" He will come back, dear lady," he said. " God looks after His own, and a brave man is the finest thing He ever makes."

Now she broke down completely. She had reached the point when she could no longer hide her feelings, and—the man she loved had gone to rescue the woman whom she regarded as her rival, gone, probably, to give his life for her. But she soon pulled herself together.

" Forgive me," she said, as she wiped her eyes. " I'm over-excited, I think . . . Mrs. Blackwood, how is she? I must see her. Perhaps they can bring her off to the yacht."

The man seemed glad of a chance to escape for a minute. " I'll go and ask," he said. " The doctor is somewhere about."

When he had gone, Margaret glanced idly at the table, which was strewn with papers. Mallowe had been working at lightning speed, and had just pushed unnecessary things out of his way, up to the other end. A worn pocket-book, stamped G. C., caught her eye. So Gerald had left that behind in his haste. Almost unconsciously, she reached out her hand for it. As she picked it up, a little glass tube rolled out, a glass tube containing a number of tiny white pills.

She had been pale before, but now she was absolutely ghastly. " What will he do, what will he do? " she muttered. " Without them, Beloved, you'll go mad and die. And I shall

never see you again," and she rocked herself to and fro in her agony.

When Mallowe returned, she did not wait for his report regarding Mrs. Blackwood. " You must send a messenger to catch up Sir Gerald," she said. " How long will it take him to do it ? "

The man stared at her in astonishment. " I doubt if he would do it at all. They've got a long start, and they'd travel fast. Still, we can try."

" Of course, we shall try," she stamped her foot impatiently, almost furiously, " Send for a man at once, whilst I get the letter ready." She had no thought of being rude, but her mind was full of the horror hanging over Gerald, the terror of the " Abstinence Storm," which must inevitably come on him amongst the gloom and dangers of the jungle, when he was exhausted physically and mentally, utterly unable to meet it.

Mallowe obeyed, wondering vaguely. It did not even occur to him to ring the bell for a boy. She had told him to go, so he went. Meanwhile, she, herself, took his chair, addressed an envelope to Gerald, wrapped the tube up carefully in a sheet of paper, then paused. Should she, herself, put in a line to him ? Would Patsy mind ?

Quite unconsciously, she opened the pocket case. It was a very small one, and there were only two papers in it. She could not help looking at them. A moment later, her face was glowing. One of them was her brief note to him, the other a portrait of herself cut out of an illustrated paper.

Instinctively, she knew that he had been looking at them just before he left.

Then she took a sheet of paper and wrote to him.

The envelope was sealed down by the time Daddy Mallowe returned with the messenger.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### A SOUL ON FIRE

"It's no use trying to go on to-night," Gerald Cardine said. "The men can't stand any more. They're tailing out for over a mile as it is, and if we were attacked—" he shrugged his shoulders expressively, but he did not mention that he, too, had been trekking all through the last night with those men, and that he had not had a moment's rest.

Jack Bartram sank down at the foot of a big tree. Although he had started quite fresh, he was more done than any one else in the party. He was wild to go on; his spirit, his passion, would have carried him on all night; but nature forbade it. He was done. The hills, the mud, and the sweltering heat had been too much for him. He rested his head on his arm, and gave a queer little sob.

"No, it's no use, Jerry. I can't go another yard. But they can't go on, either, can they? You're sure that that swine's shot, that they'll have to carry him?"

Gerald, who had himself sat down on the root of a tree, practically the only dry place, nodded.

"They've not only got to carry Ismail, but they're also hampered with Darkin and Burnham. We shall catch them all right."

The other man raised himself on his elbow. 'Where are they making for? I don't know this accursed island at all."

"For Murad Ali's country," Gerald answered. "He's a minor chief with a very mountainous district. I couldn't come to terms with him, because he and Abdulla have a blood feud. But we shall be in time, and, remember, Ismail is wounded."

Bartram drew his hand across his eyes.

"Aye, thank God," he muttered. "Otherwise, I should go clean mad," then he seemed to fall asleep, from sheer exhaustion.

Gerald Cardine smiled to himself, bitterly. Already he had discovered that he had left his pocket-book, and his morphia, behind, already he had begun to need a dose, to need it terribly.

He tried to smoke, but the cigar had lost its flavour; he took a pull at his flask, but the brandy only made him feel sick; he rolled himself up in his one blanket, assured himself that he was deadly tired, yet it was utterly impossible to keep still. He flung his limbs about, despite all his desperate attempts to rest them; every minute, his fingers seemed to be swelling to a

greater size ; every moment, his lips seemed to grow more unsteady, to twitch more rapidly.

Hell—to go on was to remain in torments of Hell for days. Would it grow worse and worse ? Could it become worse ? Could anything be worse than what he was suffering already ? Hell !—he remembered Omar, " the shadow of a soul on fire." Fire itself could be no worse than this.

How the minutes dragged by ! It was only two hours since they had camped down. He could have shot Jack Bartram, sleeping there so calmly.

A soul on fire ! A soul on fire ! He flung his hands out wildly.

" God ! " he cried. " God, if You do exist, help me. . . . Margaret ! Margaret ! " then he shivered all over.

Days of agony, unending hours of torment—could he face the prospect ? If he turned back then, he could hold out, somehow or another, until he re-entered Mati—where the morphia was.

Where the morphia was—and where Margaret was, too.

She would ask, and he would have to tell her, to tell her how, for the sake of the drug, he had left Patsy Wrench to her fate at the hands of that blackguard Malay.

No, he must go on, he must face it out. It might mean, probably it would mean, death from

sheer exhaustion, from the lack of the stimulant, but he must see it through. He could never face Margaret, if he turned back.

And, then, gradually, the horrors ceased. Warmth came back to his body ; he was able to lie fairly still. An hour later, he was shaken, trembling, utterly weak, but no longer in agony. Really, during the last few months, when he had been fighting to keep down the doses, he had been training his system to meet the terrible " abstinence storm." Now, he admitted to himself, with a kind of dull amazement, that it had not been so bad as he had expected. A few minutes later, he was asleep.

In accordance with his orders, they awoke Gerald Cardine an hour before dawn. It had been raining heavily, and his blanket was soaked, yet he had slept through it all. He sat up at once, alert, clear-headed, yet with a strange sense of unreality. Then he remembered. Since noon the previous day, he had had no morphia.

Sixteen hours without it ! God in Heaven, was it possible ! He rose to his feet unsteadily ; his fingers still felt swollen ; but there was no tingling of the nerves, and he did not want to put his hand to his lips.

Sixteen hours ! Another eight hours, and it would be a whole day. He was going on ; he must go on, without morphia—and he was strong enough to go on. He could have cried out in his

joy of his once-found independence. It was as though a prisoner under sentence of death had suddenly been liberated.

The horrors of the previous night were forgotten. They could not come on again with the same intensity. Ordinarily, he was not what one would call a " religious " man ; but now he went aside into the bush, knelt down, and, incoherently, thanked His Maker, then the thanks changed into a prayer for Margaret Cardine.

Set down on paper, it would have seemed a weird appeal, the cry of a strong man, who felt himself as a child in the hands of a Greater Power ; but, still, it was a cry from his heart, a cry of unutterable gratitude.

He would never touch it again—he was certain of that ; but, because the final struggle had been so short, though sharp, he did not assume that the break was really easy. It was because he had fought so hard before, to keep down the doses, that he had triumphed now. But for that fighting, they would now be carrying him back to Mati in a state of utter collapse, perhaps as a lunatic.

Yes, it was Margaret's victory, all hers.

Jack Bartram, haggard, worn, impatient to be off on the trail of Ismail, stared at Gerald in astonishment when the latter returned. The Raja's face was haggard too, and there were black shadows under the eyes, but, in it, there was a fierce joy, which was not only the joy of the coming

fight that must end the pursuit. There was the joy of Life, a strong man revelling in his strength, a strong man who knew his own strength.

A little food—they had brought but a meagre supply with them—then, as soon as it was light enough to see the trail, the column was off. An hour later, the leading man gave a grunt of surprise.

" Fires ahead," he said. " They slept here," then drew his kris.

There were half a dozen heaps of white ash amongst the trampled grass, and one fire which was still flickering. Also there were some palm leaf shelters.

" We're close on their heels," Gerald turned to Bartram. The latter nodded, then, suddenly, made a dive forward. A piece of ribbon, cerise-coloured, was hanging on a bush, just a scrap of it. But he remembered the cerise ribbon which Patsy had been wearing.

" Do you like it ? It would suit very few women," she had said to him, only a couple of days before.

A cry broke suddenly from some of the men who had begun to explore the shelters ; then there were the sounds of a scuffle, and curses in English. Both Gerald and Bartram sprang forward, in time to see two white men dragged out.

They were filthy, dishevelled, unsteady on their feet, but there was no mistaking who they were

—Albert Darkin and Reggie Burnham. Ismail, finding that they merely hampered his flight, and having no more use for them, had left them behind. They had been saturated with drink when they started out with him, otherwise they would never have left Mati, never have consented to be parties to the abduction of Patsy; but as the spirits worked out of them, so they had realised the madness of their conduct. During the night, there had been a furious quarrel with Ismail, a quarrel which had ended in his abandoning them. The wretched young degenerate's nerve was gone, but for that he would certainly have had them shot.

Now, hungry, wet, miserable, conscious of their own vileness, they were ready to crawl to the new Raja.

But there was no mercy in Gerald Cardine's eyes. They had offended against the code of the white man.

He would not even address them directly.

"Ask them about Ismail, Bartram," he said. They were eager to tell. They would have betrayed any one just then to curry favour with this man at whom they had once scoffed.

Ismail was terribly bad, they said. The bullet was still in his groin, and he was suffering agonies. They were carrying him in a litter, and, of course, carrying Patsy too. Ismail was mad. He must have been mad all along. He had compelled them to come with him——

Gerald cut the story short. "Bring them along, Mr. Bartram," he said. "I will deal with them later. Tell Sergeant Mahomned to see they don't delay the column. They've got to be well enough to travel—at once."

It was only two hours later when they struck Ismail's rearguard. There was no attempt at a fight. Ismail's men simply scattered into the bush. They were already the defeated side, and they saw no sense in throwing away their lives.

The panic spread like wildfire up the line.

Not a single shot was fired, but when they came on the two litters not a native was in sight. Patsy had got out of hers, and was standing beside it, dazed, whilst in his Ismail was groaning heavily.

"Jack, oh, Jack!" it was to Bartram that Patsy ran, with hands outstretched, Bartram who gathered her to him, and covered her face with kisses.

Sir Gerald Cardine turned away, a grim smile on his face. Women change quickly. . . . Yet he was unfeignedly glad. It eased his conscience immensely. Since he had learnt what Love meant, the thought of Patsy had often worried him. If she had cared for him as Gerald Raithe, the unknown, would she not think more of Cardine of Cardine Place?

But, apparently, she was a true woman. She had cared for him, as a girl; she loved Jack Bartram as a woman. His rank was nothing to

her, just as it would have been nothing to Margaret Cardine. After all, those two were kin in nature.

Now, she came across to him, with a new shyness on her. "Sir Gerald—Jerry, dear, I mean, I am so glad. It was good of you. And you've won, after all. Jack and I—oh, you understand."

He bent down, and kissed her on the forehead. Never before had he known her incoherent.

"I understand, Patsy," he said gravely. "And I'm very glad. . . . Now, go away and talk to Jack."

Ismail was dying—there was no question about that. The mud and the rain had set up mortification, and it was merely a matter of so many hours of agony. He was not really conscious now, and to move him again would have been sheer brutality.

Gerald turned away from the litter, and paced to and fro. He could not abandon the unfortunate creature, yet he knew how urgently his own presence was needed in Mati. And he knew what sufferings there were yet before that writhing form. Bitterly though he had hated his rival, now he pitied him.

To die by inches—ugh! Part of him was already dead.

For five minutes he tried to make up his mind; then he ordered a camp to be made a hundred yards down the track.

Curiously enough, none of them heard the

pistol shot. He had pulled Ismail's shirt to one side, and when they buried him, none of them saw the tiny hole above the heart. . . . But Patsy noticed how grey and worn Jerry was looking.

Somehow, he felt very worn and very grey when he sat down beside Jack and Patsy, and tried to eat some food. He was shaky again now, terribly shaky, yet, somehow, it did not seem the old shakiness.

Noon! He had been twenty-four hours without any morphia. Suddenly, the shakiness seemed to leave him. Twenty-four hours! He was his own master again. He was free, free! And he was master of Katu. There would be no more opposition. With Ismail dead, it would be futile for the chieftains on the west coast, and their German advisers, to carry on a campaign.

Twenty-four hours without morphia! He found himself wondering if anyone who had not been a morphia-victim could possibly understand what that meant. It sounded such a small thing to the man-in-the-street. "You've merely got to make up your mind to do without it," the latter, in his ineffable stupidity, says. He classes it with alcohol, which is an indulgence, whereas the other is a Horror.

If only it were possible to induce the non-morphia-taker to understand! If only it were possible for the victim to pour out his woes into sympathetic ears! But he has as much chance

of help as has a girl who has gone astray, and has confessed to an average woman imbued with the "principles" of Victorian morality.

Unless he meets a Margaret Cardine, he must fight it out single-handed, or go under. In nine cases out of ten, the latter happens. A word of kindness might mean life, but the unctuous reprobation of those who have never been tempted means death. And they go to the funeral, murmuring, "The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away," and would be inexpressibly shocked were any one to suggest that the poor, tortured soul, which had gone at last to the Peace of God, was dearer to its Maker, because of its brave struggles and its sufferings, than was all their smugness.

Still, you will never convince the British middle class that on the Last Day the Almighty will not examine their pass-books, and judge them accordingly. He will look at the balance, they tell themselves. There will be no time for Him to inquire how that balance was obtained. After all, being Respectable Himself, He will understand and appreciate their Respectability.

To-day, Respectability means broken hearts and ruined lives, means the negation of all that is good and noble and generous in this world, means a continual insult to Love, a clout flung in the face of that Deity who, in the words of His Own Son, is the God of Love. Yet, until the cataclysm comes, we shall go on being Respectable, and the hearts of the Fit, those with brains,

will break, and the Unfit—the smug, the unctuous, and the dishonourable—will flourish, and go on placing copper coins in church plates.

Twenty-four hours without morphia! Half-unconsciously, Sir Gerald Cardine had been listening to the conversation between Patsy and Jack Bartram. They were too frankly in love, and had too much to say, to worry about him. They were happy, but what was their happiness to his?

He was free, free! And the most perfect woman in the world loved him. Incidentally, he had made himself Raja of Katu; but that seemed a very small matter now.

Free! Free of that ghastly morphia, safely through the Abstinence Storm! God in Heaven, if only he could tell her what he owed to her! But she would understand. She, herself, had been through it. She knew.

He stood up, and lighted a cigar. Tobacco tasted different now. As he threw away the match, a runner came up with a letter.

Gerald's hand trembled violently as he took the envelope. Margaret's writing!

He knew, instinctively, what was rolled up in that sheet of paper, and he threw it straight into the fire. The tube cracked, and the morphia pills sizzled.

Then he read the letter.

The conditions were abnormal, and, possibly, they were abnormal people. Certainly, they were

abnormal in so far that they loved as man and woman should love.

Anyway, Margaret Cardine, fearing that he would be half crazy for want of the drug, had thrown all else to the winds.

The first word in her letter was " Beloved."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE ONE THING WORTH WINNING

A PICKET of Chinese, under the command of one of Gerald's former clerks, was guarding the head of the road leading down to Mati. The Maxim which had been captured in the first attack had been placed so as to cover the approach.

Gerald gave a li'tle nod of satisfaction. Evidently, matters had gone on smoothly during his absence.

The white man came forward and saluted. At home, he had been a volunteer; now, he was revelling in being on actual service, being in charge of an important post. "All quiet in the town, sir," he reported, then he caught sight of Patsy in her litter. "By Jove, I am glad," he burst out, in a most unmilitary tone of voice.

For a minute, Gerald stood very still, looking down over Mati. At the foot of the hill were the blackened remains of the native town, the nipa shacks, but the desolation did not worry him greatly. It would soon be rebuilt, and its sanitary condition had long been a menace to the

whole community. Probably, the fire had done a very definite amount of good.

Out in the bay, he could see the " White Lady," and his heart leapt at the sight. The woman he loved, the woman who loved him, was aboard her. An hour at the outside, and he would be with Margaret, telling her the things which had been in his heart for months, the things which, hitherto, he had not had the right to say, the things he had fought so hard to banish from his mind.

The Impossible had become the Possible. He was a free man.

Margaret ! Margaret ! Really, it was only of her that he thought at that moment. He forgot that he had made himself Raja of Katu, that he had done a more sensational thing than had any Cardine before him, that England, Europe, the whole world would be ringing with his name, in praise or blame. He remembered only that Margaret loved him, and that he had conquered the morphia.

He had kept up splendidly throughout the long march back. He was terribly shaken, like a man who had suffered from some violent shock, and, every now and then, a cold shiver would run through him, and, for a few minutes, that ghastly tingling of the nerves would assail him. But, with each hour that passed, it became easier to bear. His new-born pride in himself helped him through. The first break had been through

sheer accident, the chance of his having left his supply of the drug behind; but he had deliberately destroyed the pills which the runner had brought him.

More than anything else, however, the thought of Margaret carried him through. He could picture how she would look when he told her; almost, he could imagine what she would say, words to match the love-light in her eyes.

How wonderful it all was, the years of misery and self-reproach, of utter hopelessness, ended in that one short struggle. Of course, the physical exhaustion, the strain of the march on Mati and the pursuit of Ismail, had helped him by making sleep a necessity, and the excitement had helped him still more, but, even after allowing for these, it seemed a miracle. Vaguely, he had always imagined that abstinence would mean a long drawn-out agony, ending only in death.

"There's the 'Zeta' coming in." Jack Bartram's voice broke in on his thoughts.

He started, and followed the pointing finger Yes, the schooner was just coming round the head of the bay, under sail. Really, he had forgotten her entirely, but now it was a great relief to know that she was safe, especially as on board her was all the money for the payment of Abdulla and his kind.

Already, the Square in Mati had resumed its wonted aspect. The temporary fort had been entirely cleared away; the belfry no longer bore

signs of the Provost-Marshal's activity ; the stores and offices were open again. True, there were pickets at every street corner, and the guns on the club veranda, but, otherwise, the place was normal. Daddy Mallowe had done his work thoroughly.

It was close on sunset, and most of the white men were in the Club, but they hurried out when the sentry on the veranda passed in the news of Gerald's return.

" He's rescued her ! By Jove ! He's rescued her ! And he's got Darkin and Burnham too ! " Locock cried, then waved his helmet as a signal for the cheers.

The one shadow on Gerald's triumph seemed to have been removed. Patsy's glowing face as she got out of the litter told every one that she had come to no harm. They cheered her, even more loudly than they had cheered Gerald, but every one noticed that it was close beside Jack Bartram she stood, as she gave her nervous little nods of acknowledgment.

Locock came up to her—as Secretary of the Club. " You must come in," he said. " For the time being, this is Government House. Mrs. Blackwood is in there. She is much better, going on splendidly," and, with a tact strangely out of keeping with his clumsy appearance, he piloted her inside, allowing no one a chance to speak to her.

Bartram watched her go rather ruefully, then

allowed himself to be hustled into the smoking-room, where, to the accompaniment of the popping of corks, he told the story.

"And Darkin and the other bounder?" some one asked.

Jack's face grew black as thunder. "The hogs. They're prisoners. I tried to get at Jerry's intentions, but it was no use. He's beastly unapproachable in some ways."

"Swollen head, I suppose," the speaker was the same youth who had objected to the hangings.

A moment later, half the men in the room seemed to be giving him advice, tempered with most unflattering estimates of his character and mental attainments.

"Jerry'll be pretty rough on those fellows," an American planter spoke reflectively. "He's white all through, and they've gone clean beyond the mark. Still, there'll be the devil to pay if he hangs them. Darkin's folk in England will make a squeal."

Half a dozen voices answered him. "Hang them! Rot! He won't do that. He'll just deport them."

The American shrugged his shoulders. "As you like," he drawled. "But I guess our new Raja's a tough case, and he's got it up against those two. As I came in just now I heard him telling our Provost-Marshal to iron them, and lock them up. It kind of suggested the condemned cell."

A curious hush fell on the assembly. So far, they had supported Gerald Cardine enthusiastically, and, whilst the excitement lasted, they were quite willing not to look ahead.

They had recognised the necessity for the swift justice dealt out to the looters ; but when it was a question of hanging white men, and one of those white men the brother of the Secretary for the Colonies, it was another matter. A chill seemed to fall on them. Darkin had proved himself a traitor to his country and his colour, but—none of them wanted to be implicated in his death. Sir Joseph Darkin had a long reach.

Bartram alone was on the Raja's side. Darkin had helped to put Patsy in Ismail's hands. He wondered now why he had not shot the creature on sight. It would have saved this trouble.

"I stand by Jerry, whatever he does," he declared manfully. "If Darkin had helped a native to abduct your womenkind, how many of you would talk of mercy? Miss Wrench is my future wife," he flung the words at them, "and if Jerry lets him go, by God, I shan't."

A hand was laid on Bartram's shoulder, and a quiet voice broke in. "Thank you, Jack." None of them had noticed the Raja's entrance. "Don't worry. Justice will be done." He swept the room with his eyes, and saw that his critics consisted entirely of men whom Daddy Mallowe had declined to employ in his temporary administration.

"None of you gentlemen will be in any way responsible for my actions," he said coldly, then he drew Bartram aside. "I am going off to the 'White Lady.' They say that Mrs. Blackwood can be moved now, so she and Patsy had better go aboard. In a little while, I will get Lady Cardine to send off a boat for them."

Margaret Cardine was waiting for him in that same music room in which they had first met. Then, she had bowed gravely: now, she came forward, with both hands outstretched, with shining eyes.

For a moment, nothing was said. What did mere words of greeting mean to them, when each knew the other's secret? He bent down and kissed her hands. As he looked up again, she noted some subtle change in him, a new expression.

"Gerald! Gerald!" she cried breathlessly.

He drew her to him, unresisting. "It's thirty-six hours," he said hoarsely. "And the craving has gone. I burnt all those you sent me, every one. It will never come back, if you help."

She freed herself, but it was only so that she could put her arms round his neck, and draw his face down to hers.

"Beloved," she whispered. "It will never come back; it shall never come back. I have been through it, and I know. But I shall be always by your side—if you will have me."

His kisses, the first kisses of love he had ever given, answered her. And the kiss she gave him

back told equally of passion and adoration, the warmth and the fragrance of it seemed to linger unforgettable memories.

Now, he felt the thrill of her body against his, as he held her to him, felt her hair sweeping his face, the softness of her arms. What was Katu, what was anything, compared with the joys in store for him? For the first time for years, he laughed happily, naturally. He had ceased to be a Cardine, who was going to die for the Empire, and had become a man, who was desperately anxious to live for the woman he loved.

After a while, they sat down on the settee, and he began to tell her of the rescue of Patsy.

"Darkin must pay the price of his crime," he said. "He's a drunken degenerate, and three-quarters of the time he doesn't know what he's doing, but——"

She got up suddenly,—pale-faced, trembling. "Gerald, oh, Gerald! Don't you know? Oh, I thought you did, I thought every one did. Why, oh, why didn't I tell you? Now, you will hate me."

Gerald, too, rose. "What do you mean?" he cried. "All I know, all I care about, is that we love one another, and that you are to be my wife!" He tried to take her in his arms again, but she pushed him back, very gently.

"No, wait. I must tell you." Her voice was low, but, with a tremendous effort, she kept it steady. "I knew Joseph Darkin only too well,

I was just his secretary at first ; then there was a ceremony, in some sort of chapel ; and I believed I was his wife. When he wanted to marry the Soap King's daughter, I found mine was no marriage. He turned me out of the house, and preached that Sunday at a Young Men's Service. . . . I met Sir Charles—no matter how—and he married me. He knew everything. Then the Darkins and their friends talked, boasted, jeered, made the story public property. A Royal lady, none of whose family had ever been fit to black the boots of a Cardine of Cardine Place," her eyes flashed proudly now, " left me out of an invitation ; and Sir Charles resigned. He said that no German, living on British bounty, should insult his wife. When he resigned, the Ministry fell, and the Darkins and their friends came into power. That is all," she stopped abruptly, and stood looking at him with pitiful, tear-filled eyes. Had she lost this new-found Heaven on earth ?

His answer came swiftly, in the one way possible. She was in his arms again, and though he was trembling now, it was with fury at the thought of her sufferings. His kisses were even more passionate than before. After a while, " It only makes you dearer to me—if that is possible. . . . Fate is on our side. By conquering Katu, we have ruined Joseph Darkin's prestige with his German friends ; and now I can deal with his brother."

"No, no!" she tried to free herself. "Gerald, if you do anything to him, they will say it is revenge. . . . Dearest, it is the first favour I ask of you. Think of how it would affect me, and let the creature go. Do let him go, do let him go! It would be awful for me, for both of us. In their hearts, they would be glad to know he was dead; but it would give them such a handle against us."

Gerald's face was very black. At that moment, he would gladly have shot, with his own hand, every one of the "Good Darkins"; but he could not resist the appeal in her voice.

"Very well," he said at last. "He shall go free, and so shall the other little cad. He has admitted that he is my stepmother's envoy. . . . And, now, let us talk of the Future, our Future, the long, sweet years together, you and I as one, against the whole world."

She nestled down to him. "And am I to be Ranee of Katu?" she asked.

But he shook his head. "Weste had instructions to state that the sooner the British Government took over the island, the better I should be pleased. . . . I had expected to die here; now I want to live, with you, at Cardine Place."

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE LAST

"Oh! my brethren, there are ships of war, two ships of war, coming in through the eastern passage."

As on that historic day, when the "White Lady" made her first appearance, the fisherman's cry cut through the clear morning air, finally resulting in the awakening of all Mati. But this time it was different. Mati was no longer taking long public holidays in order to finish the cock-fighting tournaments, and, for nearly a fortnight past, Raja Ismail had been lying under the ground, up on the hills.

John Weste heard the cry, and, having had its meaning explained to him by his boy, sprang out of bed. It was over a week since he had returned from Singapore, after having sent the *Comet* one of the longest, most brilliant, and most sensational cables in the history of journalism. Singapore had tried to retain him, to pay Gerald Cardine homage through him. The story of the great raid had, literally, made the town seethe. Men saw in Sudang Harbour, not a rival port, but a

port which should be the complement of their own, a British port.

A British port—that was the main thing, the essential factor. For years past, those who had eyes to see had dreaded the growing German power in the Far East, the menace to our control of the World's Great Highway. Even out there, that ugly word " treason " had been whispered. It had been on men's lips when Mr. Lecher, M.P., the Labour leader, had paid his unwelcomed visit; it had been breathed again when Joseph Darkin, head of the " Good Darkins " had become Colonial Secretary, and had been officially identified with the two Militant Saints.

Now, however, it seemed as if Gerald Cardine had put an end to the whole hateful business. The country would support him, it must support him, and Germany's policy in the Far East would be frustrated, absolutely.

The Governor saw John Weste, privately, and spoke as a great English gentleman does in such a case; but unofficial Singapore surged round him publicly, and honoured Gerald Cardine vicariously, through him.

" Two ships of war coming through the eastern passage."

The Raja of Katu went out into the balcony of the club in his pyjamas. His first look was towards the " White Lady," his first thought was of Margaret; then he saw the incoming vessels, a large grey British cruiser, purposeful, splendid,

and a small white-painted gunboat flying the German flag.

Gerald Cardine's brows contracted. Some instinct told him what was going to happen.

An hour later, he received the British captain in the small card-room, which he still used as his office. The visitor was stiff, uncomfortable, evidently conscious of having an unpleasant task to perform.

He bowed, but made no offer to shake hands. "Sir Gerald Cardine?" he said.

The other nodded. "I am Gerald Cardine, Raja of Katu. Perhaps you do not know of the recent changes here, as I noticed that you did not salute my flag."

The naval officer flushed. He himself was an English gentleman, and, Heavens, how he hated his present task! To have to do the dirty work of that gang in Downing Street! Still, he had received certain orders, and he must obey them. He was the servant of the nation, and the nation had placed the Darkins and their kind in the Seats of the Mighty.

"My orders were not to recognise your sovereignty," he answered. "His Majesty's Government has no intention of annexing Katu; in fact it has come to an arrangement with the authorities at Berlin, by which the German Government is to establish a protectorate here. My instructions are to endeavour to induce you to leave peaceably; otherwise, I and my colleague

in the German cruiser are to take active steps to enforce the arrangement."

Gerald Cardine had gone very white. So this was the end, the end!

He had won this great prize for the nation, and now the nation was betrayed, he was betrayed.

Sold! Sold to Germany! Probably, for a few paltry thousands, our control of the World's Highway endangered, our grip on the Far East threatened. The food supplies of the teeming millions of England, of the workers who had elected these smug traitors, endangered, so that those same traitors might give more freely to chapel funds, and, perhaps, keep an extra flat in Marylebone as well.

Probably, at that moment, he was a greater man than he had ever been before. Another might have agreed, protested, cursed. Gerald Cardine accepted the inevitable. It was impossible to fight. In half an hour, that cruiser could have reduced Mati to a heap of smoking ruins, and then—the Germans would have marched in to celebrate their cheaply-won triumph.

He clenched and unclenched his hands convulsively; then, suddenly, he became calm.

"Very well," he said, "I will hand the island I have conquered over to you—but not to that damned German. You must do that dirty job."

For a moment, the other man's eyes blazed with passion; then, as suddenly, the fire died out of them.

"A dirty job, yes," his voice was very low. "Sir Gerald Cardine, you will believe me when I say I would sooner have lost my right hand than have had to be an agent in this disgraceful deal. . . By God!" He got up abruptly. "I know all it means, to the nation—and to you. I—I'm sorry, damnably sorry," all his stiffness had gone now, and his voice was more than unsteady. He was not the servant of the public now, but merely an Englishman sorrowing over England's disgrace.

They shook hands in silence; then, "I shall salute your flag before it comes down," the sailor said huskily. "And I shall send a guard of honour for you when you come off. I suppose I may offer you a passage to Singapore?"

Gerald shook his head. "No. I shall go on Lady Cardine's yacht. We shall sail this afternoon. There is nothing to keep me here now. I shall destroy all my guns; then I shall go round to Sudang Bay, and pick up my officers there."

Somehow, by the time the captain of the cruiser left, the news had spread through Mati. The Germans, who had kept out of the way since Carl Gunther's death, came down to the Club in a body, blatant, perspiring, swaggering. Walter Blackwood, too, and one or two other Englishmen who boasted of being purely business men, now openly expressed their satisfaction.

"Theories are no good now-a-days," Blackwood said, voicing the ideas of his kind. "A

theory won't swell your bank balance. Jerry Cardine has upset everything. It will take us months to get straight; but, at any rate, those Germans will run the island on business lines."

The only comment came from Miss Patricia Wrench, who had happened to come ashore from the "White Lady."

She looked Blackwood full in the eyes. "Coward!" she said quietly, "I am sorry for Alice."

Locock, Bartram, Wheeler, and a score of others came to Gerald, cursing, half-hysterical with rage, begging him to stay, to fight, to do a thousand impossibilities. But they went away very quietly, after a few quiet words from him. They had got to go on living there, and it was no use kicking against the pricks.

No man from the German vessel landed whilst Gerald was in Mati—the British captain had insisted on that; and, in spite of all that the authorities at Home might say afterwards, the landing party from the cruiser treated him as an independent sovereign.

He went through it all without any outward sign of emotion, his voice quiet and courteous, though his face was set hard. Not until he was in that music room on the "White Lady," did he give way; then, for the first time for many years, the tears came into his eyes.

He knelt down beside Margaret, and she drew his head to her bosom.

" Beloved," she murmured, as her lips caressed that prematurely grey hair. " You have done all you could, more than any other man could have done. Always remember that. Let me try and comfort you."

Then he looked up at her, with wet, flashing eyes. " Comfort me ! Comfort me ! " he echoed. " If I have lost Katu, I have won you. And Love is the Greatest Thing of all."

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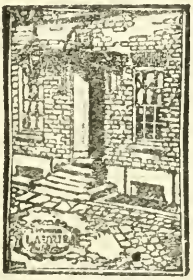

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